

MASTERS OF JADE™

EXALTED
SECOND EDITION

MASTERS OF JADE™

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INTRODUCTION

He was by profession a salesman; that had been his business since his early adolescence. More than his business, his genius. He prided himself that there was nothing alive or dead he could not find a buyer for. In his time he had been a raw sugar merchant, a small arms salesman, a seller of dolls, dogs, life-insurance, salvation rags and lighting fixtures... Amongst this parade of items there had of course been frauds and fakes aplenty, but nothing, nothing that he had not been able to foist upon the public sooner or later, either by seduction or intimidation.

—Clive Barker, *Weaveworld*

INTRODUCTION

Bartering with the supernatural, selling the birthrights of the Exalted and blazing a trail across the map, the Guild is a merchant enterprise that spans Creation. A union of financial empires backed by mortals with the wealth of titans, the Guild is a massive conglomerate that seeks to dominate world economies. It is an engine of industry that controls the movement of products, from the extraction of raw materials, to construction, to the point of sale. It is

a force for the invention of new trends, new products and services, and a provider of the same. It seeks one thing above all else: profit.

In a world once dominated by the Exalted, the Guild has risen up in the wake of apocalypse to grasp the reins that fell from the hands of dying god-kings. To buy, discover, or steal the greatest power of them all, the Guild pushes business to the ends of the world and beyond. For the Guild knows that destiny is not the sole purview of the Exalted.

To that end, money becomes a form of Exaltation.

AS THE TALE OF EXALTED CONTINUES...

Masters of Jade explains how to use the Guild in your **Exalted** Storytelling campaign. It gives a close up view of how the Guild sees Creation, and how merchants—normal men and women—get the better of gods and the Exalted while pushing the Guild's agenda.

Chapter One: The Guild gives an overview of the Guild as an organization, from its founding to the ascension of a Guildsman to the Directorate. Finally, it touches on how the Guild exists in the face of supernatural opposition.

Chapter Two: Points of the Compass paints a picture of the Guild as a Creation-spanning network of trade hubs, merchant franchises and industries each with their own culture and way of doing business, including differences between Guild caravans in each Direction.

Chapter Three: Chains of No Iron explores the relationship between the Guild and its supernatural clientele. It details Guild interactions with demons and the raksha, and shows how the Guild is perceived by the Celestial Exalted. Finally, this chapter covers the Guild's dealings with the Underworld, and tells the tale of the curse that has followed the Guild since its formation.

Chapter Four: A Game of Masks introduces the web of politics and power the Guild weaves around itself to keep it safe in a world full of gods and devils. This chapter also details the hierarchs who sit on the Guild's Directorate.

Appendix: Counted and Wanting Not unveils at long last the rules for building and running an organization.





CHAPTER ONE

THE GUILD

It happened that there was a Guildsman who scorned Heaven with his wealth.

Where he made his stronghold, he raised a tower so that he might look down upon the world. There he minted silver rupees from his treasury and drove nations into poverty. Soon there were no kings but for the Guildsman, whose power was vast, his empire great. As he swallowed up neighboring regions, deposed kings, flattened temples and placed the populace in shackles, he watched the strength of his money grow, and boasted that his empire would last forever, for his fortune was immense and growing, and his coin would carry his name to the far corners of Creation and keep it long after the pillars of Heaven had fallen down.

When word of this reached Saturn, she stood up from the Games of Divinity and said, "Vast is your wealth and far is your reach, but nothing under Heaven may stand if those pillars fall. All the world is dust in time." Then she made the sign of Endings against the Guildsman's house, and his

tower fell, and all of his interests crumbled. The mines that pulled his wealth from the earth were filled in and forever lost. Fires raged through his storehouses. His slaves aged and withered but did not die. His coins tarnished and turned to lead. Those who traded with him struck his name from their books and he lost all credit.

In the ruins of the tower laid a young Solar swordsman who was the merchant's protector. Glimpsed through curtains of dust he saw a silhouette of billowing robes and flowing hair, a figure untouched by the miasma of destruction. The Sidereal reached out to him and said, "Come now."

The Solar's eyes swept the rubble for signs of his employer.

The Sidereal took his hand to secure his attention. She shook her head *no*. "This is not your Ending."

When they were gone, the shadows moved, and through them came the ghosts of the Timeless Order of Manacle and Coin.

THE BIRTH OF THE GUILD

The Guild was born in the time after the Contagion, to a world decimated by the Balorian Crusade and rocked by wars and terror that were only assuaged by the power of the Scarlet Empress. More an idea than an organization, the Guild—much like its founder—saw fortune in a shattered world. But more importantly, the Guild saw a chance to seize something that had been long held out of the reach of mortal hands. It was a chance for continuity.

One man can claim credit for the Guild. In the wake of the apocalypse, where others were concerned with rude survival, Brem Marst was a man of ambition. A carpet-bag carrying swindler and failed politician, Marst's true birthplace is unknown. Some accounts claim he hailed from Whitewall or Gethamane. A shrine near Marst's tomb in Great Forks claims that his family was a merchant concern located in the area almost three hundred years before the foundation of the city. This claim is a conjecture almost completely derived from questionable evidence. The only supportable account of Marst's time in the region that would become Great Forks is when he stopped overnight in the shadowlands (then ruled by the Princess Magnificent), got drunk and taught the ghosts how to keep a ledger, freeing them from a temporal loop that prevented them from moving on. His entombment in the area remains a source of speculation.

What is known is that Marst traveled thousands of miles, and that one of his journeys brought him to the Lap. There he came into contact with a cloister of merchant-philosophers and market-spiritualists called the Counters. The Counters were in the possession of antique treatises on the function of trade, many of which spoke of the Order-Conferring Trade Pattern and its role in stabilizing reality and perpetuating market enterprises to keep the Pattern strong.

Surrounding the Counters were dozens of merchant cults that had sprang up in interest of these teachings. These groups believed that they could supplement their business practices with prayers to the Pattern, following the rituals and coda of the First Age, and that wealth would simply come to them; that they only had to sit back and wait. But in his travels, Marst had seen the truth: that world was gone, and the old rules—and the old magic—no longer applied.

Still, Marst studied the Counters' manuals on ancient trade. Originally he'd intended to gain their trust as an interested student and use his influence to rob them blind. Instead, he found himself feeling indebted. Exposure to their cults had shown him how helpless mortals had grown at the beneficent tit of the Exalted, such that without them, and in a world where Exalted magic was failing, people would cast about, praying for the trade that would never come, and waste their lives building idols to money instead of going out and reaping it from a world that was bleeding wealth into the air. Given such easy marks, the formation of the Guild began with Marst turning his sights from flensing



Exalted



the Counters of everything they had, to overturning and conquering every merchant cult in the Lap.

Moreover, Marst's time with the Counters showed him the scope of what the world had lost when the First Age collapsed. He saw a vacuum of power; entire industries and Creation-wide trade made possible by sorcery and artifice that had vanished. He saw markets for goods that no longer existed, and entire realms of services no longer rendered. He saw more than just pathways to trade that seemed impossible, but the way the ancient Exalts had of inventing new markets and then being the sole purveyors and regulators of the industries they had created. On top of that, they could *make people want anything*, to the degree that people believed their lives would be incomplete without said services rendered. As Marst continued to read, he saw the absolute dependence the Exalted had on money, and the ends they went to accrue it.

Marst could not help but feel that the real power of the Exalted was money, and so the roots of the Guild took hold in his mind: It would be a Creation-spanning organization, pushing products to the end of the world and beyond. It would corner every available market and be the sole source of goods and the services needed to produce or maintain them. It would control public interest, constantly opening new markets, cultivated and driven by salesmen who could sell water to the drowning. It would resurrect the lost markets of past ages, and it would seek to fill all the voids of fortune and production vacated by the Exalted in the wake of eschaton. Thus the Guild would wield a power to contend with the Exalted, for it was the very power they sought, and the one which held them up. He saw that *now* was his chance to make something for men which had previously only been for the gods: to become indispensable, to build that which lasts and must be supported, and to have the power to deny the Exalted their birthrights, or sell them—if the price was right.

Marst traveled to the River Province in RY 88, arriving in the wake of the Empress's failed invasion. With reconstruction spurring business, Marst used his newfound capital to test his idea. The experiment that birthed the Guild began with Marst systematically buying out or running out all of his competition, turning all service industries into formidable lodges to control the production of goods. Where others were trying to use money to build kingdoms, Marst was using his to control the roads between them, and the movement of materials and goods those wealthy rulers would need to survive. Almost overnight, the most powerful nations of the River Province were dependent on Marst's favor and willing to back his contracts and support his monopolies. After all, everyone feared the return of the Empress with an even greater army. Even at its inception, the Guild seemed like an impossibly strong ally, which could spur reconstruction and build up the strength of the region through organized trade and development.

Marst's experiment grew fast, rolling up merchant houses and trade leagues and spreading out to the Hundred Kingdoms in the east and west into the Threshold. It grew

so suddenly at first that none could unite to stop it. Those who were bought out did not realize what they were selling to. Others tried to buy out competing interests to grow their own and stem the flow of Marst's power, only to find out that they themselves were already owned by his conglomerate, which had purchased their creditors and taken over their debts. Effectively, for a time, all attempts to hold off Marst's experiment only served to grow it larger. Willing support from merchant houses in Chaya, Sijan, and Nexus only further cemented his lock on regional trade, and the formation of the League of Many Rivers in RY 95 allowed Marst a stable platform for the formalized binding-together of all the organizations and unions he now controlled. Thus, in RY 99, the Guild was born.

While the Guild would travel as far as Chiaroscuro and Whitewall, for the next forty years it was based primarily in the River Province, where it was protected in its growth by a network of stable, powerful nations that could stave off the Realm and would not be easily overrun by hordes of barbarians. From this region, Marst began to plot the future of the Guild, which, even in his own lifetime, would begin to spread its way across Creation, reaping a harvest of wealth that had fallen from the fingers of dying god-kings.

During this time, Marst's resolve would be tested. The Empress saw that the Guild could hand her the keys to the Scavenger Lands. She sought to entice Marst into a partnership with the Realm. He responded by offering to buy Arjuf. Bribes notwithstanding, she coupled her offers with threats. Marst then began to funnel money and weapons to Threshold states that were in rebellion to the Scarlet Empire. As a result, these nations would break away from the Realm and join the League of Many Rivers. Thus Marst established an example of resistance that the Guild would follow throughout its history.

ORGANIZATION

The Guild forms a chain that links nations across Creation. It employs thousands from diverse backgrounds, hailing from lands whose only connection is the presence of the Guild within their borders. Such a vast enterprise varies in administrative style and aesthetic by region, but the overarching structure of the Guild is the same in every part of the world.

The ranks of the Guild break down into four rough divisions—administration, mercantile, crafts and labor.

Merchants are the public face of the Guild and its most prestigious members, running the gamut from lowly apple-cart vendors to mighty merchant princes crossing the Threshold in their perfumed and gilded wagons. Sedentary merchants known as *keeps* (as in: store keep, bar keep) form the reliable lower and middle ranks of the merchant class; their profits individually pale in comparison to the Guild's mighty caravans, but collectively combine into an endless stream of revenue. Above the keeps, enjoying far greater prestige, are traveling merchant princes. The

THE ADVENT OF SILVER

Late in his life, Marst wrote about the need for a different material currency than jade. For all its value, jade brought undue attention to Guild movements. Spirits are drawn to it, and the Dragon-Blooded seek it with maniacal force. Furthermore, jade's production value is much higher as a constructive element, limiting the amount of jade coinage that can ever be in circulation. Marst saw that the Guild would never be able to arrest total control of the world economy from the Dragon-Blooded as long as jade was the dominant currency. So he called for the introduction of a new standard. It would need to be a precious metal that held no special value to supernatural interests and could not be so readily traced by relevant magic.

It took nearly 600 years before the Guild would introduce the silver standard and presage the end of the Realm's death grip on the Threshold. But the work of the Guild is never finished. Silver stands on shaky legs. It has yet to be accepted in many economic circles, and Guild alchemists fear that the sorcerous power of the Exalted may suffice to poison a mundane metal so that the material can no longer be traded with. Indeed, many Guildsmen hold onto Realm-based investments and ventures backed by jade, and such resistance from within prevents silver from being the strongest standard in Creation. After all, if the Guild were to put all of its interest in a metal that might be mystically converted to lead or might give off a luster that infects the body with hemorrhagic fever, the Guild would collapse almost overnight.

Marst's final testimonies also describe the mystical resonance in mundane silver which might allow it to be attuned to what remains of the Order-Conferring Trade Pattern. Supported by a mystic infrastructure that was burned into the framework of reality by the Solar Exalted, no magic would suffice to universally alter the nature of coins linked to the Pattern. To that end, Marst also described how detailing currency was necessary to link it to the Pattern: legends, seals, coats-of-arms, and the faces of figures with great destiny all aid in the Pattern's recognition of standard and scrip. Unfortunately, Marst's theories were based on conjecture fed by things he had read almost a century before, during his time with the Counters. Of these things, his memory was incomplete, and in the centuries since Marst's death, the Counters were dispersed by unknown assailants, and all of their records were burned.

most successful such princes rise to become factors—the investors of the Guild and managers of its hub cities and regional interests.

Administrators are held in less esteem, but are nonetheless vital—clerks, accountants, reeves and chargs perform work that merchants have little time or inclination for. They have little opportunity to amass a fortune or gain authority in the Guild, but their pay is as reliable as they are, and they enjoy the full protections their seasonal dues afford them.

The Guild could hardly function without its countless craftsmen, from fletchers to smiths to wagon-makers, but holds little respect for most. Those who rise to the rank of master artisan form a notable exception—the masters of the Guild's various craft lodges often treat with merchant princes as equals, their workmanship and trade secrets coveted by one and all. Lodges are trade compacts within the Guild, working to pass down tradecraft secrets from master to apprentice, to force competing local craftsmen out of business, and to discover and protect vital trade secrets—the weavers of the Lodge of Black Silk, for example, are the only organization in the Threshold who know how to weave subdued ghosts into a cool, lightweight, sorcery-resistant fabric. In Brem Marst's day, lodges were universal—all blacksmiths belonged to the Lodge of Red Iron. In the modern Guild, the identities of various lodges have splintered by Direction, and the practices of Guild smiths in the South bear little resemblance to those in the West.

Laborers are never afforded true Guild membership, but are nonetheless an indispensable part of Guild operations; the Guild requires a prodigious amount of lifting and hauling. Most laborers are cheap contract or conscript workers, preferably recruited from destitute regions—they work for the Guild until a job is done, and are then turned out to go on their way. Other merchants prefer slave labor, or use of the dream-eaten, finding pay negotiations with ditch-diggers and freight haulers tedious.

The Guild itself is a pyramid, the affluent elite supported by a vast horde of laborers, craftsmen and junior members. The Directorate floats atop this edifice, an unblinking eye that oversees the overall operations and policies of the Guild. Nine hierarchs sit on the Directorate, drawn from the Threshold's most powerful and influential merchants—almost all are former factors.

Below the Directorate, the Guild radiates policy and authority through its hub towns. While the Guild owns real estate and business in most of the noteworthy population centers of the Threshold, hub towns are something else—Guild-friendly cities positioned at important crossroads or along major trade routes, where the Guild assembles its caravans, stores its goods, amasses its master craftsmen, and hosts Guild Councils.

Guild Councils are Directorates-in-miniature, assemblies of the nine most powerful and influential factors and master artisans residing in a hub town. They meet to determine





overall trade strategies for the Guild within the surrounding region, rig markets, speculate on investments, and otherwise discuss profit and politics. Guild Councils also deliberate over petitions to join the Guild, resolve internal disputes among members of the Guild, and maintain the Guild's position within the hub city itself—the Guild rarely outright controls its hub cities, so keeping the local government friendly is vital.

Finally, each hub city hosts between one and twelve Guild wardens. The Guild contains a staggering number of powerful, wealthy members—and even more individuals who *wish* to be powerful and wealthy. While every factor worthy of the title employs investigators to weed out corruption within the ranks of his merchants, craftsmen and administrators, Guild wardens hunt more elusive prey. They look for signs of subversion to outside powers among the ranks of the factors themselves, or for conspiracies with the potential to damage the Guild's monopolies, compacts, or even its continued well-being. In RY 528, Guild wardens discovered that Night Eyes, a Lunar Exalt, was simultaneously impersonating the entire Guild Council of Caraban Crossroads; in RY 698 the merchant prince Chöm Chanap was found to have been selling rival traders to a noted raksha seductress; in RY 712 an Outcaste warden named Arryo Mirabilis uncovered a conspiracy by four young Guild engineers to flood Great Forks and hold the city's temples ransom; factors still shudder

when the tale is recounted, imagining the reprisals the stunt would have provoked.

While individual Guildsmen may resent the intrusions of wardens, the Guild itself tolerates no threats directed at them. The presence of wardens and investigators helps keep the Guild focused on its primary goal: profit.

SLAVERY—THE HARD TRADE

Across the vastness of Creation, the Guild's legendary caravans trek through storms of snow and dust, drawing lines of human cargo across the backs of nations. Bid by whip and wheel, the Guild transports goods to the distant edges of Creation. It comes back with slaves, in coffles and in cages, and loaded into the hulls of ships bound for ports in lands that sound like places in a dream: Windgate, Zalakar, Kirighast, Yane, Chiaroscuro...

The Guild's trade in slaves is Creation-wide, and the backbone of the Guild's vast wealth. Where independent slavers and slave nations merely subsist on the benefits of forced labor, the Guild perpetuates slavery as an institution, and the need for slaves creates a desire for trade and the progress in industry that drives the Guild.

The hard trade is made possible by the Guild's vast and almost peerless network, which allows it to easily acquire raw materials, trade goods and services and move them to places where they are scarce or otherwise wholly unavailable. In these

places, it is likely for the Guild to foster a trade in human chattel. In return for the materiel needed to support one's infrastructure or the goods to advance one's own industry, many turn to slaving as an alternative to paying from their own coffers. The benefits to the slaver are manifold.

But slavery of the few is just a first step toward the slavery of entire nations. By supplying a people with the goods they need to advance their civilization, the Guild makes people dependent on the taking of slaves. Slave states run the risk of owing their whole civilization to the Guild, and when the supply of slaves runs low, or the Guild fabricates a disinterest in slaves, a nation's goods and industries can be turned toward the Guild's service in order to cover the cost of supplies they must buy from the Guild when slaves are not in demand.

The viability of slavery comes from a surplus in the populace. Where people outnumber the natural resources (such as arable soil) or number of jobs available, it is less valuable for a farmer with only a small amount of land to hold a large number of slaves. Similarly, the owner of an ironworks may have more than enough hands to forge steel, but not enough ore to process. These are the conditions that lead to slave taking. Debtors, criminals, undesirables, and the unlucky are thrown into chains and sold to Guild slavers, who move them to Nexus and Chiaroscuro, where they are sold to places all across the world, including the Blessed Isle and the courts of the raksha.

But slavery also forms a social stratum that is almost as important in many societies as its economic benefits. In these places, the most undesirable roles and tasks are performed only by slaves, the extremes of which vary by culture. In many places, the main trade in slaves is a flesh trade, dealing wholly in slaves to be imprisoned in brothels or to be sold as courtesans to interested princes. In other places, slaves are made to herd goats and sheep, or to count apples and tend vines. The social attitude toward slaves, and what makes a task so horrific, is as variable as the slave's own opinion on his subjugation. For some, it is a never-ending torment. For others, it is the way of their culture. The latter tend to be slaves who are lucky enough to hope for manumission. The third kind of slave is the one that finds himself carried into the dominion of the Fair Folk. These slaves soon cease having any sort of opinion.

DRUGS—THE SOFT TRADE

The Guild is an empire built on vice. There is no service which the Guild will not try to provide for the right price. Part of its power has been its recognition that the harvest, production, and synthesis of drugs is key in maintaining its presence throughout the world. Even where slavery is reviled, and the Guild pennant is seen as nothing more than a flag of piracy, the demand for drugs means that the Guild will always find its way into cities whose borders it has been warned not to cross.

At the simplest level, the Guild's drug trade provides an enormous source of income—drugs are a luxury good, a vice,

and the Guild has always known that an addict will eagerly spend what he can't afford to get what he doesn't need. While addicts welcome their next fix, rulers are generally less willing to allow the Guild's drugs to debase their populace. Met with such resistance, the Guild often uses necessity as a lever to force the permission of vice: A city-state that refuses to let the Guild sell opium and qat will be met with initial compliance—but also a reciprocal refusal to sell seven bounties paste to the sick, maiden tea to wealthy women, or age-staving cordial to the ruler and his court. When the principality relents on the matter of vice, the Guild's more desirable services return.

Drugs are more than a simple source of revenue to the Guild, though. The drug trade is one of the Guild's most potent political tools for assisting those it wishes to court or manipulate, as well as one of the strongest weapons with which it can punish those who have incurred its wrath. Well aware of the effects its various drugs have on a populace, the Guild has used fast, underpriced infusions of cheap, pacifying drugs such as qat, marijuana and opium to calm rebellious populations many times in the past—it has even used this method to subdue unruly satrapies at the Realm's behest. (Where the Guild does not extract political concessions or favors for such efforts, it simply sticks around to profit off of its newly-created customer base over the following decades.) There are many similar tricks for adjusting the attitude and energy of a populace: a moderate flow of opium and marijuana into a region indicates that the Guild is simply making money as usual, whereas an infusion of rock cocaine is an act calculated to destroy lives and induce economic devastation.

The Guild knows that flooding a city-state with affordable drugs is one of the most effective ways to hobble a government. With clerks showing up to work with opium smiles and guards standing watch in qat-induced dazes, efficiency drops, crime rises, and important projects slow to a crawl. The Guild uses such displays as threats—messages that wise rulers heed by giving the Guild whatever it is they want.

Those who persist in angering the Guild, or who are already beyond reconciliation, find that a pharmaceutical assault has a second, nastier phase: once the people are firmly addicted, the Guild cuts the city off. With the populace suddenly crashing into withdrawal, business grinds to a halt and violence spikes as desperate users tear the city apart looking for the next hit. The Guild sometimes seeds rumors suggesting that a government crackdown is responsible for the shortage, but usually doesn't even have to bother—populations are quick to turn their eyes to their leaders when someone needs blaming. Riots and burning buildings serve as a warning to other, more observant principalities: the Guild does not need to bestir a single company of its vast mercenary armies to destroy its enemies.

Even supernatural leaders possess little defense against such tactics—the miracles of the Exalted are many and splendid, but even they find it a difficult task to convince people to control or deny their vices. Indeed, few in number



are the gods or Exalted who manage to instill such discipline in themselves.

JOINING THE GUILD

Anyone with talents fitting one of the Guild's three member branches may petition to join the organization. The Guild is nondiscriminatory on the basis of gender, nationality, and even species—its ranks currently include gods, demons, Exalts, raksha and beings who defy easy definition.

An applicant must present his petition in one of the Guild's hub towns, with the assistance of a sponsor—a Guildsman in good standing who has not acted as a sponsor for another applicant within the last year and a day. The application process usually takes a month, during which time the sponsor meets with the local Guild Council to argue for the applicant's inclusion. The Guild doesn't simply accept any beggar off the street; the sponsor must provide evidence of the applicant's usefulness, often in the form of examples of the individual's craft, or letters of recommendation from persons of relevance. In other cases, the Guild Council may pose tests or challenges the applicant must overcome as proof of worth.

Applicants rarely meet directly with the Guild Council; the sponsor acts as the petitioner's advocate throughout the process. This is especially true in the case of supernatural applicants—the Guild learned long ago to sequester the silver tongues of Exalts and raksha away from those sitting in judgment over them.

When the Guild denies candidates it is most often on the basis of lack of interest—the applicant has no skill the Guild finds sufficient or useful—or conflicting ideology, rejecting applicants they believe will abuse their membership to further the goals of another organization to the Guild's detriment (very few Dynasts hold Guild membership for this reason).

If the Guild Council accepts the petition, the applicant must pay initial dues generally equal to Resources •• (for unpopular or troublesome petitioners, bribes sometimes raise this value to Resources ••• or even ••••). The new member is then directed to a senior member likely to make good use of their talents.

BECOMING A HIERARCH

Achieving the highest rank in the Guild is no mean feat. One must lie, cheat, steal, murder, and accrue more capital than any one mortal should ever amass and still be considered to espouse humanity. In short, one must win an election.

There are few *certain* circumstances which lead to the election of a new hierarchy. Most believe that the death of a hierarchy heralds the elevation of a Guildsman to the ranks of the Directorate. Given the mortality of most hierarchs, death forms the most convenient and believable reason for such an induction. In reality, death holds little power over these proceedings. Often, the death of a hierarchy sees the movement of his consciousness, his mental and material properties, and even his name, to a recipient who has been prepared to receive them. And though the Guild strenuously

denies it, there has been a time where a living hierarchy's death saw no change in his position. Because of the nature of his contribution to the Guild, he could not be replaced; Directorate meetings moved to a shadowland; the spectral hierarchy continued to serve.

In light of this, not every election of a new hierarchy begins with the death of an old one. A new hierarchy might be elected to conceal the life, or continued existence (or service) of a hierarchy who wishes to retain control over the Guild while effectively disappearing from the Directorate. He may be doing this to avoid the continued aggressions of a god or the Exalted, thus removing Guild interests from the warpath of the divine. Or he may be absenting himself because his direct control over the Guild is no longer favorable; perhaps he has married a demon or chosen to consort with a raksha whose very consciousness may wrap itself around his soul. In either case, his interests may be compromised. Such a hierarchy may remain on as a consultant to the Directorate, with vastly reduced authority, but retaining all the material power of a veritable titan, making him an irreplaceable, individual piece of the Guild infrastructure. In such a case, the hierarchy's powers must be passed on.

But sometimes the elections are set off by the emergence of a player with such financial power that his standing alone threatens the purview of one or more hierarchs. Such a player cannot be incorporated as a mere factor, because his presence in a region could see him take over the action of multiple Guild factors, wiping them out or stealing them from the Guild to join his organization. A figure who can open new markets to the Guild due to connections with the infernal or the divine, a figure who has somehow attained the nebulous support of the Lunar Exalted or who is backed by the Realm or an Eclipse Caste Solar are examples of such a person. When encountered, such a man must be courted and incorporated into the Guild's hierarchy, or driven out of business. If the Guild feels that such a figure would be impossible to control, the Guild goes to war in an effort to remove him. Indeed, the Guild functions to prevent anyone who is not loyal to the Guild from gaining such power in the first place. But if such a person would make a valuable addition to the organization, the Guild approaches him with the offer of incorporation or destruction. In essence, the approached party learns that he must win the election or be destroyed. There is no other option.

When such a party accepts these terms, elections are held.

The elections are decided by a vote of factors and master artisans in hub cities across Creation. Generally, when the Guild opens such elections, many powerful candidates for the role from inside and outside the Guild arise to announce their candidacy for the position. Sometimes factors unite, and take the risk of pooling their resources, effectively dissolving their own interests to create a person powerful enough to challenge the target of the elections. Other long-time Guild rivals or business partners, often backed by the gods or the Exalted, or indeed one of the Chosen themselves may also

emerge to bid for a position on the Directorate. And to use that phrase is not a metaphor; like all positions of power in the Guild, membership on the Directorate is *always* for sale to the highest bidder, and many elections are spurred by the appearance of a person with the right price in mind.

Such elections are an exercise in vast corruption, murders both quiet and blatant, sabotage and epic acts of bribery, espionage, and theft. The Guild has no incentive to discourage such corruption; rather, these actions are the yardstick for a candidate's success. In a government election, the same actions would be reprehensible. In a Guild election, the ultimate victor is the one who not only bribes the most votes, but also has enough flair to convince the factors and the master artisans that they will be remembered once he has ascended to the Directorate. He must be a person who can manipulate, influence, and intimidate his benefactors without alienating himself. He must ensure the couriers of his rivals never reach their destinations, and that his bribes are always better than those of his opponents. In the Guild, someone who campaigns ruthlessly and charismatically,

who convinces people to not only accept his bribes but to look the other way while the cities of their business partners burn, is someone who has mastered all the talents that make a legendary Guildsman. Invariably, to pull off such a coup requires obscene wealth, a web of favors and reputation spanning an entire Direction and more, and the influence and material resources necessary to wage a continent-spanning war of sabotage, threats, and murder. Often, the winner is the last person standing.

A HIERARCH'S ASCENSION

Before assuming his duties, custom demands a newly-elected hierarch make a long, ceremonial procession from his place of residence to the great Guild Hall of Nexus. The purpose of this procession is to display the wealth of the one elected, and thus the Guild; and so it resembles a constant, months-long parade of jugglers, courtesans, musicians, dancing bears, charmed serpents, alchemical fireworks and faerie glimmers. The procession passes through hub towns along the way, where the hierarch-elect is celebrated and

EXALTS IN THE RUNNING

An Exalt who seeks a seat on the Directorate has an epic battle ahead of him. Most concerned with the Guild's interests simply will not allow an Exalt to triumph in an election, no matter what bribes are on offer. Mortal opponents for the position will band together to dismantle an Exalt's power bases and knock him out of the running. Dominating the Guild is the belief that the organization is mortal-run so that it will always remain a harbor for mortal interests. Gods and the Exalted have a way of overlooking the plights of mere mortals, whose lives seem gadfly to those who will see infinite ages, or ride on death's back to take new breath and open eyes in a Creation that will not have forgotten them. In short, the Guild represents a clear example of mortal continuity, and proof that the actions of men and women can be as indelible and perpetual as those of the gods and the Chosen. Simply put, at some point the founders of the Guild decided that rather than be pawns enslaved by dispassionate immortals, that they would be the ones doing the enslaving. This attitude, unspoken, carried by actions, became the fever-heat behind the Guild's relentless drive for profit. Like the raksha who toil endlessly to break through the walls of the world so that they might bleed over Creation until there is nothing left, the Guild spreads out to the borders of Creation, reaping profit and devouring all who stand in their way. For both, it is a matter of survival.

This is why the Guild is resistant to the ascension of an Exalt to the Directorate. Where gods can be predicted, bought, and made to agree with the Guild's never-ending quest for profit, the Exalted more often seek to use the Guild as a puppet to some other end, twisting it away from its purpose to support their own agendas. The Guild knows and fears its own dissolution under the control of a divine hierarch who might see the Guild only as a massive engine of capital to fuel his war with whatever demons haunt his ancient memories. Therefore, any Exalt who seeks a seat on the Directorate has to be dedicated to profit before any other concern. Hierarchs who have realized the power of the Solar Exalted have often dreamed about what such a figure, when dedicated to the interests of the Guild, might do to push the Guild beyond the wildest dreams of Brem Marst. To date, no known Celestial or Solar Exalt has ascended to the Directorate.

However, such a hero might one day appear, for even within the ranks of the Guild there have been those who were Chosen. Yet, even if an Exalt were to disguise his nature, a bid for the Directorate brings added danger. The Bureau of Destiny closely monitors all Guild elections for the signs of Solar or Lunar activity, and the Wyld Hunt has, even in its failing years, had a way of being close to the most violent epicenters of the election. Sidereals who could have easily hidden their natures to vie for a seat on the Directorate have simply never tried. As the Fallen Era continues on toward schism, and as the Celestial Bureaucracy grows more indolent and corrupt, there are fewer eyes watching the agents of destiny to keep them in check. The Guild may yet see the rise of a Sidereal hierarch. But to what end would she bend the Guild?



feasted by factors looking to make a good impression—or poison their guest.

The procession also acts as a final test of the candidate's suitability for office. He must remain visible throughout the celebration, but he must also remain alive. This may be the new hierarchy's first experience of the Game of Masks; whether by bodyguards, body doubles, misdirection or magic, he must display his opulence and guard his life on the long road to Nexus. By the time he arrives, he is sure to have already experienced some of the travails of the job.

Upon arrival in Nexus the new hierarchy is introduced to his retinue—typically a lawyer, a multilingual translator, a cultural and political advisor, and a secretary—all of which were the personal staff of his predecessor. The first task of his retinue is to verse him on the dossiers of important factors, actors and agents within the Guild infrastructure, and to bring him up to speed on current plans of the Directorate. This is a process that continues throughout the hierarchy's first year, but his first induction is a cram session where he learns who needs to be killed, who needs to be bribed, and who needs a job (sometimes all three at once). Then, very unceremoniously, he is brought mid-session into a Directorate meeting, introduced, and expected to shut up, listen, and be in pace with the topic by the end of the meeting.

Beyond that, accounts of the induction ceremony differ. Some claim the new hierarchy is anointed with blood and spices, and swallows a silver coin that binds his spirit to the Guild. Others speak of meditation and attunement to an ancient First Age device that shields the hierarchy's mind against magic, or of the solemn memorization of coded command-poems to permit interaction with ancient animated intelligences warding against the power of She Who Lives in Her Name and hidden away in a floor of the Guild Hall that doesn't exist.

Afterwards, the new hierarchy inherits the remaining ledgers and concerns of the individual he has replaced. These may or may not correspond to his existing power base, and so a hierarchy's first year is likely split between tending ongoing affairs, trading regions of authority with other hierarchies, and sitting meetings of the Directorate to discuss and vote on matters of Guild policy. During this time the new hierarchy will discover unseen hands interfering in his project even as he occludes his own plans and workings from his fellows. He will come to wonder if he is seeing the rest of the Directorate meddling in his affairs, factors quietly attempting to push their own agendas into his work, or if perhaps his predecessor is not as departed as everyone has been led to believe. He refines his own masks and deceits in response, and the Game plays on.

SITTING THE DIRECTORATE

What draws a mortal to seek a seat on the Directorate? What powers does a hierarchy command?

The reward of a seat on the Directorate is simple—wealth and influence surpassing that of any other mortal in Creation.

Hierarchies can set policy and deliver pronouncements for vast regional swathes of the Guild in the name of increasing profit, promoting dominance, and preserving autonomy. They can throw their support behind those they wish to see rise, and need not even personally orchestrate the downfall of those who earn their ire—seekers of a hierarchy's favor are quick to pull down those known to have displeased him.

Like factors, hierarchies invest in projects from their own coffers and reap the rewards of their business acumen; but the opportunities that present themselves to a hierarchy are as far beyond a mere factor as the Exalted are beyond mortal men. Who else could personally finance the construction of cities and trade routes to connect them? Who else would the Guild's mighty factors approach on bended knee, bearing gifts and considerations?

Who else would be such a target? The bill for wealth to shame Heaven comes due in treachery, paranoia, viciousness; in a hierarchy's endless struggle to keep grasping hands free of his fortune; in living within the Game of Masks until the hierarchy comes to doubt his own identity. This is the price that awaits a mortal who would live as a god.

AGAINST THE CHOSEN

A Guildsman stays an Exalt's daiklave with a promise of his family returned. A merchant prince tempts a Lunar to give up her protectorate by whispering the name of her Solar mate. A Night Caste folds a factor three times and pins his body together with knives; without the password only the factor knew, a dam explodes, and all the evidence against him is washed away. The Night is now hunted by his allies, who believe he staged the flood because he had no evidence against the factor, who was blackmailing him, and that Night flooded the town to hide his own skeletons. Their idea is supported by information from mysterious sources, backed by coin from an obvious party. A god-king stands upon the highest wall of his city, staring out into the night, shedding the terrifying radiance of an angry sun. His answer to the Guild's offer is *no*. The darkness beyond the city walls fills with the torchlight of his enemies, their armies amassed and placed at his gates by Guild coin. A Twilight's lifeless corpse is dragged through the streets by a team of horses. She refused to assemble weaponry for the Guild, and the Wyld Hunt found her hidden workshop. These are just a few of the ways in which the Guild has orchestrated the downfall of the Chosen. For all of their individual might, as soon as an Exalt cares for something or someone, the Guild has a lever to bring him to his knees.

The Guild can threaten the Chosen because of one simple realization: the Exalted are human. Just like any other client, the Exalted have weaknesses that can be exploited: a love of vice, dependence on infrastructure to maintain their holdings, friends and family less powerful than themselves, an inability to be everywhere at once (one weakness the Guild does not share). The Exalted are

not immune to temptation, extortion, or fear. What they care for can be used against them. But the Guild does not hate the Exalted, nor is it dedicated to their eradication. Rather, the Guild seeks to treat with the Exalted on its own terms, from a position of strength. This requires that the Guild sometimes come down hard on those Chosen who threaten in time to become major competitors for control in regions dominated by the Guild.

More often than not, the Guild seeks to offer power to the newly-returned Solars. Where a Solar might bankrupt himself on the cost of a single manse, the Guild can help him build a city cornered and lined with fortified manses. It can pave his streets with gold-flecked marble, run water through his wells and fountains, and people his markets with the best artisans and entertainers the world over. It can man his walls with the finest soldiers available. It can offer countless boons if only the Solar will uphold Guild trade and use his talent for politics in the Guild's favor. A Solar who rejects such an offer might not be attacked by the Guild, but he will have to watch as a rival takes the Guild's offer. That the Guild can place a Solar's enemy high above him can give pause to even the most virtuous Lawgiver. Many must consider partnering with the devil they don't know to prevent the ascension of the one they do.

As a general rule, the Guild wears a façade of support to the sun's Anathema. Given that they do business with

demons and mortwights, they hold no taboo about a client so long as there is opportunity for profit. Misgivings about the dangers to their souls aside, Guildsmen rely on the Solars themselves believing any given merchant will automatically hate and fear them, and will seek to out them to the Wyld Hunt. Most Guildsmen are aware that the Realm is beyond answering their calls for help, especially with as often as the Guild instigates communication with elements the Immaculate Order has deemed blasphemous or unholy. Others simply will not call on the Wyld Hunt purely out of a desire to see the Realm waste its time and resources chasing legends. In essence, Guildsmen try to keep their personal feelings out of it, and take the long view. That is, at some point the Directorate deemed it safe to approach the Solars and see if the stories were true, if they were indeed monsters. And when Guildsmen more regularly walked away safe from those meetings than they did from those with raksha or barbaric clientele, the hierarchs mandated secret and solicitous trade with the sun-kings.

Not every Solar is interested in building a kingdom for himself. But the Guild is resourceful: Solars have been offered jobs, safe passage, and anonymity. These services, like any other the Guild renders to the Exalted, have a high price, and will always put the Exalt in the Guild's pocket for the foreseeable future. More recently, the Guild has begun to approach Solars with boons to entice them on a personal level. Amongst the things offered to Lawgivers: a collar which





will pacify a Lunar Exalted; a hearthstone which could save a fiefdom from the spread of a shadowland; information on all members of the Wyld Hunt within 500 miles; the location of the Solar's own First Age tomb.

The secret nature of the Guild's dealings with the Anathema has several advantages. It makes them deniable to economic regions who despise the tainted ones. It also makes it possible for the Guild to conceal its methods from the Exalts in question, citing that to reveal their secrets would open the Exalt himself to scrutiny; as agents, the Guild can work for the Exalt without raising suspicions. The duplicitous nature of this claim gives the Guild a large advantage.

Just last year, the Guild received a letter written by an Infernal Exalt seeking the whereabouts of his mother. The Guild realized they had sold the woman to the Fair Folk. They quickly bought her back, but her soul had already been partially consumed. Instead of returning the woman and risking the Infernal's wrath, they took her to a sorcerer who was able to divide her now-pliant soul into seven distinct parts. Each was sealed into a yasal crystal, which the Guild then set about hiding across Creation.

They then approached the Infernal and claimed that an angry sorcerer split his mother's soul in seven and sealed it in crystals hidden across Creation, and gave him the one crystal they had already "found." The Slayer then practically begged their favor if only they would help him obtain the rest.

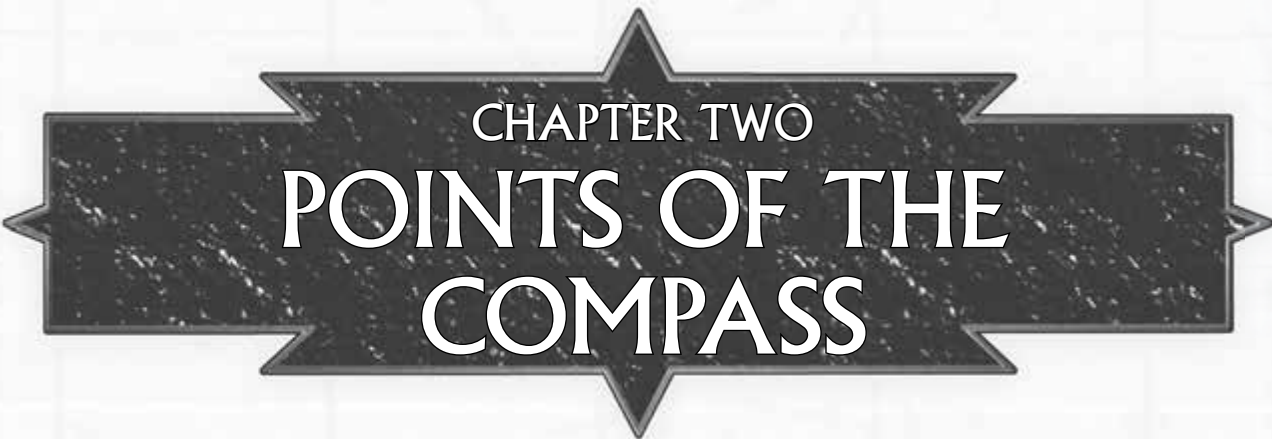
By this point, the yasal crystals had of course made their way into the hands of enemies of the Guild, whom the Infernal destroyed. The Guild made itself indispensable to the Exalt's quest, aiming him at their foes and pulling support when he hesitated. Later, the Guild simply ordered the Infernal to drive away a Lunar whose territory was nearing a hub city, a task that brought him no closer to his mother's return.

By now the Infernal realizes that the Guild has used him. But he has his mother's body and six shards of her soul. He now consorts with the demon Munaxes, and believes he will soon find a way to replace the seventh shard of his mother's soul with the hollow-imbuing power of She Who Lives in Her Name. In the meantime, he continues to pretend to be a loyal ally to the Guild, just as the Guild pretends to be a loyal ally to the Infernal.

In the Southwest, a Guildsman named Shura Kukai unearthed a relic built by Kimberly during the Time of Glory. Employing a conjurer, he interrogated one of the barzinoa and learned that Dukantha was now reviled by the Great Mother, and would go to great lengths to secure her favor once again.

Hiding the relic, he then conspired with the raksha Niaza to eat part of his memories so that he could not be forced to give away his plans. With nothing more than a sketch of the relic, Kukai was able to gain an audience with the Lintha lord. Now acting as Dukantha's agent in securing the relic—with Niaza as arbiter of his memories—Kukai directs the power of the Lintha navy against his rivals, and has been granted permission to open markets in Bluehaven.

Of course, this is all a ruse for his true ambition. Kukai's partner, Niaza, is a raksha on the path to becoming ishvara. Her peculiar powers include the ability to eat memories and to shape sorcery. Working through Kukai, she has convinced many Lintha she could devour the impurities from their minds, ridding them of their half-blooded mentalities to bring them closer to Kimberly. In reality, Niaza bites deep into the racial memories of the Lintha, going far into their mimetic past in order to touch Kimberly and get inside her power. As a consequence, Niaza has the appearance of a beautiful and hateful nāga, and grows more a thing of the ocean's depths by the day.



CHAPTER TWO POINTS OF THE COMPASS



From wind-swept plains to burning sands, from the icy peaks of Diamond Hearth to the storm-tossed islands of the Neck, stalwart Guildsmen travel the world in their quest for gain. But the Guild is not uniform. In every Direction, the Guild takes a shape best-suited for dealing with the world around it.

THE EAST

In many Eastern cities, the Guild keeps a district of its own and has done so for centuries. From these districts, ships and caravans traverse the Scavenger Lands and spread out to the rest of Creation. Many routes were established long ago, trails pounded into roads by generations of yeddim, profits calculated and predictable: *This* much qat from Great Forks, traded for *that* much iron from the foundries of Nexus.

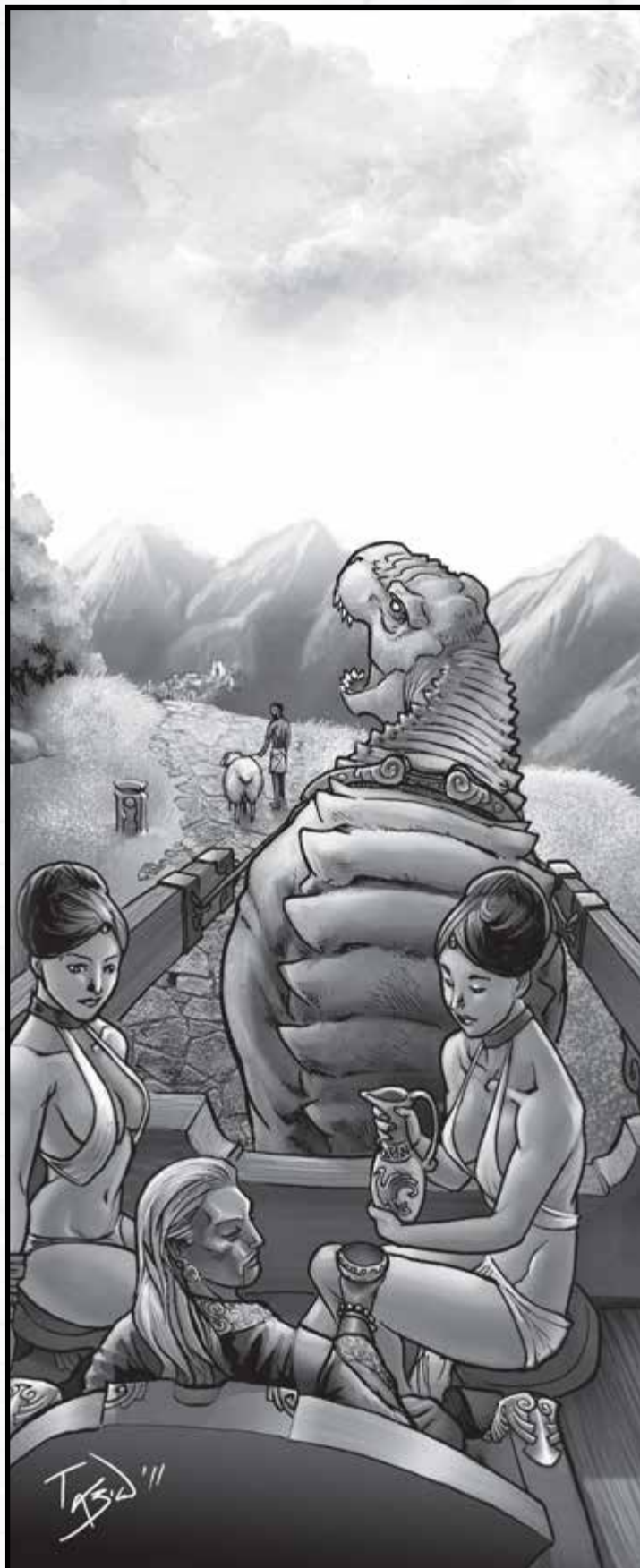
But the Guild isn't stagnant. Ambitious men and women constantly look for new trade routes and new commodities. From its deep roots in the Scavenger Lands, the Guild sends tendrils into forest and jungle, ever growing.

THE GRAND CARAVAN

Today the Guild's district in Nathir convulses with activity. Calvet Arris, a third-generation merchant prince, is about to launch his latest caravan on a great loop through Marita, Greyfalls, Sijan, Nexus and points between. He spent months arranging the cargoes and financing while his caravan-master hired yeddim, wagons, guards and everything else needed for the journey.

However, the raft of timber from distant Farhold arrived a week late. Not that Arris cared about logs—but the Farhold convoy also carried a shipment of rare Eastern herbs. Doctor Alethia, the Guild's regional mistress of medical alchemy, would not release Arris' consignment of seven bounties paste until she received the next batch's ingredients.

At last the Farholders arrive, and with them the canoes and flatboats of the rough voyageurs, laden with boxes, bales, and jars of rare herbs. Alethia's servants collect the treasures of the distant woodlands. Two hours later, her soldiers escort



the precious crates of seven bounties paste to Arris, and the caravan can depart.

The teamsters sweat and swear as they work through the night, loading wagons and hitching yeddim. Runners roust the mercenary guards from bawds' beds and gutters. Hundreds of men converge on the great courtyard where the caravan assembles. The old caravan-master Jotrey screams abuse at everyone while Arris ticks off items on his checklist.

Miraculously, dawn finds everything in place. A Guild thaumaturge conducts the Ritual of Exodus that consecrates the new caravan. "Move out!" Arris commands. The drovers crack their whips, the yeddim grunt and the wagons start to move. As the caravan crosses the bridge over the Meander River, Arris orders his liveried outriders to blow a fanfare on their trumpets, proclaiming to Creation that a merchant prince embarks on a new quest for profit.

THE MAGNATE'S WAGON

Merchant princes always lead Guild caravans, and in the East they do so with pomp. Calvet Arris does not limit himself to liveried outriders with trumpets and banners. Instead of a yeddim, a tyrant lizard pulls his two-story, gold and azure wagon. The great reptile is so drugged it barely has wits enough to follow the ham dangling from a pole over its nose. During fine weather, Arris lounges on his wagon's wrought-iron balcony while six nude, gilded slave girls coo, fan him with ostrich feathers, feed him grapes or simply kneel in adoration. He waves at other travelers, his eight coded seal rings glittering in the sun, and tosses sweetmeats to children. In bad weather, he stays inside reading reports on Guild factors and rival princes, seeking clues to new business opportunities, and the golden girls stay the hell out of his way.

THE SHRINE-WAGON

Next comes the shrine-wagon, its yellow silk prayer-strips fluttering in the breeze. Each caravan has a small god or elemental as its guardian. Guild thaumaturge-priests recruit spirits with useful talents, from weather control to curing disease. The caravan god also needs social skills to mollify, cajole or intimidate local spirits into leaving the caravan alone. In return, the spirit receives weeks or months of daily prayer. In the Scavenger Lands, at least a half-dozen spirits apply to become the god for each new caravan, often with references from past employers. The Guild's hired priests then adorn the wagon with whatever sacred fripperies the spirit prefers.

The gods of major roads frequently offer subordinate spirits as caravan gods. Arris' current journey, though, takes him through several forests; and so he chose a wood elemental. The wood spider Niklixikrin built its own shrine-wagon, a gnarled confection of spun wood and potted bonsai trees. The elemental has guided caravans through Eastern woodlands for decades and is one of the Guild's most respected caravan gods. What's more, the wood spiders of the Dowerwood only sell their mushrabiya screens—wooden filigree finer than human hands can carve—to merchants endorsed by Niklixikrin.

THE RITUAL OF EXODUS

The priest who blesses the caravan actually conducts a Procedure from the Art of Spirit Beckoning that links the spirit's Essence to that of the caravan.

The Ritual of Exodus (2, Charisma + Performance, 3, 20 minutes): The spirit must be present amid the caravan and agree to the terms of employment. The caravan becomes one of the spirit's domains of influence, and the shrine-wagon its sanctum, until the caravan dissolves at the end of its journey. While the Procedure does not grant a spirit the use of any new Charms, it does make the caravan a valid subject for Domain Manipulation Scenario, Hurry Home or other Charms the spirit already knows. Spirits who seek Guild careers strive to develop Charms that can help or protect a caravan. See **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV—The Roll of Glorious Divinity I**, pp. 31-32, for a "generic" caravan god with an assortment of useful Charms.

OTHER WAGONS

Most of the caravan wagons are big, plain boxes full of cloth, jars of wine, bales of qat and opium, cakes of salt or other goods. These are usually fortress wagons or wall-wagons (see **Scroll of Kings**, p. 143), so the Guild can protect itself against bandits and other threats. Several wagons carry roof-mounted ballistae or other heavy weapons, as well as supplying platforms and cover for archers.

Aside from merchandise, the mercenary guards need a wagon for their tents and other supplies, and quarters for their officers. The carpenters, blacksmith and other artisans who fix the wagons need traveling workshops. Prudent merchant princes hire a doctor, too, and supply her with a hospital-wagon. Cooks and chuck wagons feed the merchants, guards and laborers. The thaumaturges who supplement the caravan guard—the Guild always has job openings for weather-workers and spirit-dealers—receive their own laboratory-wagon. Stranger possibilities include cages on wheels that transport exotic beasts, or mortuary wagons that carry dead clients or the Guild's professional exorcists.

Interspersed with the Guild wagons, but pushed toward the rear, are the "caravan fleas": petty traders with their own pack animals and wagons, jugglers, minstrels, whores, and other folk who join the caravan for protection or to cater to its personnel.

Last come the slaves. This merchandise moves itself, chained into long coffles. Only special slaves—skilled artisans, concubines and the like—ride in wagons with the other cargo. Common slaves trudge through the dung and dust left by the rest of the caravan.

RIVERBOATS

The Guild also sends fleets of cargo ships up and down the Eastern rivers. River pirates pose enough of a threat that Guild convoys attract their own entourages of fellow travelers. Just as with caravans, the convoy has its own shrine-boat and guardian spirit (often a river-god or water elemental). The merchant prince, however, usually lodges in one of the cargo ships rather than keeping a boat to himself. When the ships move upstream or across the current, the brisk plashing of the paddlewheels usually drowns out the thudding feet of the slaves who power them.

TRADING POSTS AND VOYAGEURS

At the other extreme from the massive caravans, lone voyageurs paddle canoes and walk forest trails deep in the Eastern wilderness. Some of the Guild's most precious medicines, such as age-staving cordial and seven bounties paste, are made from plants that only grow in places no caravan could ever reach. Voyageurs also hunt rare birds and animals for their pelts, parts and plumage. For living treasure, they risk disease, toxic animal, plant and insect life, and the lethal attention of hungry beasts, maddened spirits and unfriendly natives.

In Nathir, a feather-worker takes delivery of gleaming purple plumes that shall complete a priest's ceremonial cloak. A master swordsmith pays a full dirham for jars of forest mimic blood; it will quench a new artifact, the Lying Blade. One cloaked and hooded voyageur presents himself at a side-door to Doctor Alethia's fortified compound. He—she? it?—brings the great physician living, disembodied arms taken from the Wyld, as replacement limbs for the maimed and very rich. Or maybe something else.

A PHARMACEUTICAL FACTOR

Doctor Alethia is the Eastern Guild's greatest medical thaumaturge. Though she joined the Guild more than a century ago, Terrestrial Exaltation and copious use of age-staving cordial keep her looking like a woman in her 20s. Rich emerald hair hints at her Wood Aspect. It is common knowledge in the Guild that she comes from the





Blessed Isle, but abandoned the Scarlet Dynasty for a more profitable career.

The Exalted physician now oversees the Guild's collection of rare *materia medica* from a wide section of the far Eastern forests, while personally developing new and improved drugs. She does not involve herself in caravans or most other Guild activities; this specialized factor deals only with voyageurs and trading posts in the deep woods.

Doctor Alethia still takes patients who can afford her services. In her greenhouses, she raises blood berries, seeds of the immaculate blood and other magical plants (see pages 155 and 159 of **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**). She also uses an artificial Wyld pocket to perform literally impossible transplants of limbs and organs (see page 26 of **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. II—The Wyld**). Her vault holds three bottles of celestial wine for when all other remedies fail.

"Everything is poison, nothing is poison: Only the dosage matters." Doctor Alethia's encyclopedic knowledge of medical alchemy includes rare and terrible poisons such as Winter's Breath. She compounds such toxins for fellow Guild members and has no illusions about their intended use... though she has saved lives using extremely diluted Yozi venom.

Alethia's current interests are in gaining access to Yu-Shan (she wants to consult *The Procedures of Creation* in search of medical alchemy forgotten in Creation) and the Bayou of Endless Regret (she hears tales of strange herbs that grow in the shadowland). She suspects, however, that she must look beyond the Guild for agents brave enough to take such missions, and powerful enough to survive them.

TRADING POSTS

Instead of hunting rare plants and animals directly, some voyageurs prefer to befriend the natives and pay them to do the work. The catch is that the intrepid trader must visit the natives where they live... and in the far East, that often means up mile-high trees. The Tree Folk and other Eastern tribes feel comfortable in trading posts that resemble bird's nests or spider webs of living vines. Visitors from civilized lands find it takes some getting used to. With so much money at stake, they make the effort.

Jinru Rose-of-Dawn became one of Doctor Alethia's best suppliers of Eastern herbs by making that extra effort. A raksha preyed upon the tribes in the region where she collected gudgeon-root, solar mistletoe and other medicinal herbs. Rose-of-Dawn tricked the raksha into drinking a fatal toast of iron bush juice (see p. 156 of **The Books of sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**). Then she picked a handsome and impressionable young hunter, introduced him to big city sex, and married into his Tree Folk tribe. Fifteen years later, her husband is second-chief. The tribe flaunts its wealth through gifts to local spirits and other tribes. The spirits love the tribe, and the tribe loves the Guild. Rose-of-Dawn wonders, though, how her green-skinned, half-breed children will adjust to the school in Nathir she has planned

for them. She wants them to follow her into the Guild, not to grow up as barbarians.

RUBBER, SUGAR AND SLAVES

The Gray River recently became an important new arterial for the Guild. For centuries, the Guild saw the Southeastern jungles as little more than another source of slaves. The ghostly destruction of the slave entrepôt of Shacklegrieve curtailed that business. Now, however, the Guild focuses on the region's agricultural potential.

The Guild deploys mercenary armies to enslave entire tribes as plantation workers. This far from civilization, the Guild can extract the region's coca and cacao, sugarcane and rubber with no limit to its cruel efficiency.

CHAING-DAV

The Guild's regional hub is the river port of Chaing-Dav. A few moldering stone temples, their sculpted spires blurred by time, are the only remains of a First Age city. Ranks of slave pens and brick warehouses form the new Chaing-Dav. People live in shacks of scrap lumber, canvas and bamboo—all but the reigning factor, Odom Sagami, who lives in a newly-built, domed manse a mile from the river.

Odom Sagami's coffee-and-cream skin, almond eyes and long, straight hair mark him as a member of the Izhalvi tribe of Harborhead. As an adolescent, he was taken in a slave-raid and sold north. At Great Forks, he worked his way from field hand to overseer, and then to free member of the Guild. He entered the slave trade, then the sugar trade, then every trade the Southeast offered. Now in his fifties and immensely rich, Sagami bleaches his hair to look older and wiser. His concubines give him many children: He sells them when they reach 14. If they cannot work their way to freedom as he did, they deserve nothing better. It pleases him when Guildsmen call him Uncle Sugar.

PLANTATION LIFE

Every year, ambitious young Guildsmen march into the jungle to hack out new plantations for Uncle Sugar. One such would-be merchant prince, Drannis of Varsi, manages a plantation where enslaved natives tap a thousand rubber trees. Every month, a long file of bearers marches a hundred miles to Chaing-Dav with huge baskets of raw latex balanced on their heads, and Drannis' fortune grows. When his tour of duty ends in two more years, Drannis will be rich enough to finance his own caravans.

First, however, Drannis must survive. The jungle swarms with horrible diseases: sleeping sickness, dysentery, hemorrhagic fever, and many more. Drannis suffered a bout of malaria when he first came to the Southeast; he does not want to chance it again. He opens his strongbox once a day to check his precious stash of seven bounties paste.

Drannis spends much of his time on the shaded verandah of his airy, tile-roofed home. Through jaundice-yellowed eyes, he watches the overseers as they watch the slaves.

The plantation's last manager left Drannis with a discipline problem. Drannis gave new orders: Any slave who causes trouble has his legs burned off and is left by a nearby anthill. That caused even more unrest for a time. When Uncle Sugar came on inspection tour, though, Drannis showed his resolve through the torches that lit the garden party in the factor's honor. Each was a native dipped in rubber, tied to a stake and set on fire.

The slaves are now docile. Would that the folk who remain in the jungle followed their example. Drannis hates the drums that beat in the jungle every night. "Talking drums," his accountant calls them. Sometimes Drannis sends out a squad of mercenaries to make them shut up. Sometimes the mercenaries don't come back.

Drannis' accountant, a quiet man whose name few people bother to remember, has seen three managers come and go. He hears the drums in the night: *Doom doom doom*. A few minutes later, a breeze carries a faint echo of drums from further away, another tribe repeating the message: *Doom doom doom*. How far do the drums speak? Who listens? There are tales the natives tell. Tales of a lost city of ape-men ruled by a sorcerer-queen; of angry ghost-tribes and brutal, bestial gods. *Doom doom doom*. He shivers and plans his escape.

THE SOUTH

Sweet smoke rises from censers and hookahs in the counting-temples of the South. As the caravan readies to depart, Guildsmen throng about in rich silks, currying their camels and packing talisman-embroidered saddlebags with furs and waterskins. Slaves haul water from the temple well; wagons brim with amphorae, while camels drink deep to bloat their humps for the long treks between sapphire oases. In the South, water is life.

THE SOUTHERN COAST

Rivers and green hills mark the southern shores of the Inland Sea. Hot, dry summers and wet, mild winters provide ideal growing seasons for many crops. The people here are fervent agriculturalists: wheat is grown heavily, while hillside orchards produce olives, oranges, lemons, dates and figs. Vineyards turn out much of Creation's wine. Slave plantations grow sugar cane, coffee beans and tobacco. Farmers devote whole valleys to opium poppies, and even swampland is put to use growing papyrus and wild rice.

SOUTHERN SOCIETY

Tradition and superstition are the watchwords of the South. The prospect of drought and famine demands rigid adherence to custom and abets the efforts of selfish, capricious Southern gods and elementals to gather mortal cults. Temples sprout like jeweled mushrooms among Southern cities, trading divine blessings for silver; workshops turn out amulets and talismans by the thousands to ward off malign spirits.

Resources such as fresh water, cropland and forests grow ever sparser as one travels inland, as do the settlements that

spring up around them. Such havens are isolated and remote, making long-distance trade a matter of survival. Separation by unforgiving wastelands, hostile tribes and aggressive neighboring states calls for large, efficient, well-guarded caravans. This is where the Guild comes in.

HIERARCHY AND SLAVERY

Social inequality dominates the Southern Threshold. An elaborate caste system enthralls Varangia. Noble houses serve the autocrats of Paragon and Gem. Every adult citizen of the Lap spends thirty years in indentured servitude to the state. Slavery is so widespread among the coastal states that up to a third of a region's population, from farmers and miners to artisans and domestics, may consist of chattel slaves. In many such states, not owning a slave serves as a mark of poverty. The Southern Guild profits hugely by importing slaves from elsewhere in the Threshold.

As one travels away from the agrarian coast, the nomadic tribes of desert and steppe also have castes and hierarchies, but prize bravery, self-sufficiency and stubbornness. They respond violently to oppression and, if subjugated, are prone to rebellion. The nomads also have a history of pursuing and retaliating against slaver caravans, making it preferable to capture entire tribes in one go when possible. Guild slavers experiment with various means to break tribesfolk's spirits, from beatings and drugs to mutilation and torture of loved ones. None are more feared than Civren Ai, a renegade Sijanese funerist who employs the thaumaturgical Art of the Dead to bind and torment the ancestor spirits of the tribes he raids.

Another merchant prince, Rinata of Roaringale, sells black-armored troops to Southern petty tyrants as 'living zombies'—soldiers that know neither fear nor pain, who obey orders even unto death. These are dream-eaten slaves purchased from the raksha, ingrained with subtle thaumaturgies and trained to follow simple commands conveyed by the beating of war drums. Though lacking skill and initiative, they conjure superstitious fear in their foes and possess unshakable morale, making them worth their price.

MATCHMAKING

Merchants find profit even in arranged marriages. In Varangia, Guild astrologers are paid to indicate that an arranged marriage is auspicious, while Guild alchemists in Zebremani assure spouses-to-be that they have a complementary balance of humors. Other merchant princes take a cut from the sale of attractive, genteel or well-trained young people from poor families as spouses for the rich—a process divided from slavery by the thinnest of lines. And some matchmakers deal with the supernatural, earning tidy profits and divine favor by arranging for wealthy mortals and forlorn gods alike to obtain god-blooded offspring.

MAGIC, MYSTICISM AND TRADE

The supernatural has a powerful—though often indirect—impact on Southern commerce. Coins bear the





names and images of local gods or are stamped with images associated with water—oases, ewers or flowers—to bring luck, and merchants tap them with iron nails to ensure that they aren't the work of Fair Folk glamour. In the Lap, where the Immaculate Philosophy is strong, merchants debate the Immaculate Texts while bargaining, with the final price favoring the superior scholar.

But Southern merchants also traffic directly with supernatural beings. Gods and Exalts haggle in marketplaces, while traders venture forth into the wild places to bargain with djinn and raksha. In exchange for prayer and souls, they obtain rare prizes—including mundane riches such as water, ivory, firedust, precious metals and gems, and magics such as garda feathers, raw jade, First Age treasures from beneath the sands, and a range of oneiromantic wonders.

THE CALADRIUS PALACE

Near the Lap, in the foothills where the eastern slopes of the Firepeaks touch the steppes, the Caladrius Palace's domes and towers of red granite, pink quartzite and obsidian are incised with elegant arabesques. Atop the highest tower, the elementals called caladrius make their nests. Manifesting as great white birds with golden crests, their power is to take a mortal's sickness into themselves and fly to the upper air where the disease is burned out by the fire of the Unconquered Sun. Only the Contagion is beyond their grasp. Five caladrius birds lie entombed beneath the manse, slain by that dread disease when they attempted its cure.

Once, travel to the manse required an arduous pilgrimage through the desert. But the Guild made a pact with the caladrius birds. In exchange for building a caravanserai-lined road from the manse to the Lap, the Guild exacts a tithe from all who would claim the caladrius cure. Hundreds of stone cairns along the road mark the final resting place of those who died without receiving the birds' gift, and more have been interred there in the fifty years since the Guild bargain than in all the centuries before.

THE SOUTHERN GUILD

Guild operations in the South are populated primarily by Southerners. Despite the Directorate's efforts to bring them in line with how things are done in the Scavenger Lands, they adhere to Southern customs and remain steeped in Southern culture and superstition.

COUNTING-TEMPLES

Since the Contagion, the South's prayer-hungry gods have been especially meddlesome in mortal affairs. Mercantile endeavors can meet with misfortune without blessings from a spirit court connected with commerce, such as the Court of Seven Metals, the Open-Hand Court or the Constellation of the Rising Smoke. As a result, trade and religion have become intertwined. Some priesthoods merely finance caravans and take a share of the profits. Others host entire mercantile complexes—counting-houses, warehouses, workshops and caravanserai—within the

temple precincts. The Guild bargains with tractable gods to maintain such 'counting-temples,' with Guild factors anointed as exchequer-priests.

Southern gods have more leverage in their dealings with the Guild than their counterparts elsewhere. This is due not only to local tradition, but also to cartel-like agreements facilitated by shared membership in local spirit courts. Over the past century, the Guild has sown discord within those courts to undermine their integrity. The resulting tumult has been good for Guild business, but less so for recalcitrant gods whose counting-temples have been turned over to more tractable rivals.

MERCHANT FAMILIES

In many Southern cultures, merchants are expected to hire kinfolk, and those whose employees aren't blood relatives are deemed unlucky to do business with. Guild merchants in such places do the same, but their relations must demonstrate their skill or be relegated to figurehead status. 'Senior aides' do the real work; the most adept are rewarded with promotion to posts in less family-oriented locales—or marriage to appropriate family members.

When two other Guild wardens failed to uncover the source of financial inconsistencies surrounding Talt's counting-temple of the Rising Smoke, Melian of Port Calin was hand-picked by the Directorate to attack the problem. She found it expedient to marry the pandit Altan, giving her the social leverage to tease information out of reluctant conspirators. Now she looks to the future. Abetted by her Calinese midwife and a Varangian astrologer with sizable gambling debts, she's had her last two pregnancies thaumaturgically delayed to ensure auspicious horoscopes for her children, granting them a place at the pinnacle of Varang society.

STEPPE AND SAND

Beyond the mountains spread the dry, empty places—first the steppes, then the desert—that extend to the world's edge and the Pole of Fire. These lonely lands contain few people and fewer settlements. But they hold great opportunities for Guildsmen.

Crossing the steppes calls for horses, of which many breeds are native to the South. Yeddim are used as well, but their water and fodder requirements make them prohibitively expensive for smaller, poorer caravans. And horses are most easily bought and sold among the Southern nomads, who are every bit the equal of the Marukani in horsemanship. In addition to horseflesh, trade with the nomads provides ivory, furs, leather and leather goods, bows of quality, gold and uncut gemstones.

Beyond the grasslands, vegetation shrivels and withers; dark earth gives way to rocky plateaus and seas of sand. To cross the desert, one requires either camels, yeddim—if one can afford to water them—or sandships. Aided by thaumaturgy, these small sailing vessels glide over the sands on ski-like

runners as ordinary ships cross water, vastly speeding travel across the Southern wastes.

The desert carries its own distinctive risks, of which dehydration, sunstroke and sandstorms are the most mundane. Drovers must probe for dry quicksand and the brittle glassy ceilings of fireworm tunnels, while sentries watch for the desert's animate perils, such as dust nomads, Fair Folk raiders, ghost sandships and giant centipedes. Particularly fearsome are the ghostfire fields—places where caravans or nomadic tribes perished centuries ago, their sun-baked bodies sheltering ancient and terrible hungry ghosts which smolder with a fitful glow like sunset or guttering embers.

What treasures make these risks worthwhile? Oases nurture groves of frankincense and myrrh; mines yield veins of precious metals and gemstones. Dry lakebeds are crusted with rock salt. Firedust flecks the desert sands like shoals of dying stars. And storm-swallowed sandship fleets lie buried beneath the dunes alongside the ruins of First Age towns, cities and manses, their contents intact despite ages of neglect.

SANDSONG

To spot these hidden dangers, savants employ *sandsong*, a Spirit Beckoning art that induces the least gods of sand grains to sing to one another. From the echoes of this shifting, ethereal chorus, a sandsong master may discern whatever shapes lurk within a storm or beneath the dunes.

WATER-FORTS

Water is rare and precious here. The desert sun desiccates men and beasts alike, and the number of yeddin found on a typical Eastern expedition would drink an oasis dry without slaking their thirst. Fodder, likewise, must be brought rather than foraged, so that caravan masters schedule the slaughter of pack-animals for meat and blood. So the typical desert caravan is small and self-contained. Drovers do double duty as guards, while merchant princes fetch and carry when the need arises—there is no luxury here.

This does not apply to the Guild.

The Guild has erected stone forts along key trade routes like the desert roads leading to Gem. Each surrounds a sorcerously evoked freshwater spring. Underground cisterns and storerooms hold water and fodder for the huge Guild caravans that bring foodstuffs to deep Southern settlements and bring back ore and firedust to the coastal cities. A low outer courtyard protects non-Guild merchants willing to pay ruinous prices for water and shelter. Guardsmen with bows and iron-tipped spears watch from shaded niches for attacks by nomads, Fair Folk or rival consortiums.

WADIS AND OASES

Even in the deepest South, where the stubbornest xerophytes can scarcely find purchase, the desert is not wholly lifeless. Water lingers from desert storms or bubbles up from beneath the earth to form oases, and these green places are treasured by desert folk and caravaneers alike. Where water is most plentiful, people dig wells and grow gardens of cereals, herbs, fruit trees or incense-bearing shrubs. Smaller oases cannot support full-time habitation but suffice for nomads and merchants to feed and water their herds.

Maintaining an oasis is a delicate affair, both physically and spiritually. Each has a god that tends to its Essence flows. Such gods invariably have sizable cults among both oasis residents and regular travelers, for they hold the power of life and death over those in their domain. Furthermore, they form a major bloc in the Court of the Lotus Pool, which encompasses most gods of fresh water and oasis vegetation in the South. The collective clout of the court, which includes many city gods, tribal patrons, and legions of Water and Wood elementals, can't be taken lightly—not even by the Guild.

Codes of hospitality bind oasis-dwellers and their guests. Mortal hosts ritually offer water and salt to visitors, and misfortune befalls whichever party should harm the other. The patron deities of nomad bands and merchant caravans must perform a more intimate service for the oasis god. A caravan god adept at such rites is welcome everywhere. Caravans with less adroit deities must follow circuitous routes to avoid a dissatisfied oasis god's displeasure.

TOMB-CITIES OF GOLD

When the Southern cities of Dazra and Irivande fell to the Contagion, the sun's heat baked them as dry as the surrounding desert. When those of its inhabitants who became ghosts mastered the nemissary arts, they found their former bodies sufficiently preserved to house them. Now, Guild caravans follow the ruins of the old aqueduct network through the desert to these shadowland cities and treat with their dead princes. The gold mines of Dazra and the silver mines of Irivande continue to yield treasure, torn from the earth by a workforce of mindless walking dead raised from the bodies of those who passed into Lethe or Oblivion. The nemissary princes drape themselves in precious metals, reveling in the chill of rings and diadems, while their viziers trade a fraction of this wealth to Guild merchants in exchange for human bones with which to mend the failing bodies of the undead.

CITY OF THE YELLOW STONE

During the First Age, when the Celestial sorcerer Frey Irenio ruled the desert city of Ophas in the uttermost South, he bound seven hundred demons into hepatizon-caged yasal crystals which he entrusted to the officers of the city. Abandoned after the Usurpation, Ophas has been laved for over a millennium by the dry tides of the Bordermarches. The Guild knows the city's location but has mounted few expeditions, as the place is stalked both by Fair Folk and





by Wyld-warped demons freed from their crystal prisons by gullible travelers.

HERON'S DREAM

The merchant prince Heron of Zebremani takes wild risks in his expeditions deep into the Southern desert, but it's not mere profit that drives him. Southern storytellers sing of a nameless mortal who conjured the city of Cozen out of dreams in a single night, and of the thousand dreamers that flocked there to dream wonders into the world—until the dream turned to nightmare, leaving ruins thick with hungry ghosts amid the sands at the world's edge. Heron has dreamed of Cozen since childhood, and the closer he gets, the more he burns to find that phantom city.

SOUTHWEST

The Southwest is a place of dramatic contrasts, standing as it does between the poles of Fire and Water. It is divided from the South proper by the Fire Mountains, or Firepeaks, where the weather is mild year-round and small nations teeter amidst high, isolated valleys and in extinct volcanic calderas. Merchant princes lead caravans of llamas past the natives' terraced farms and god-ridden monoliths to trade for gold, textiles and pottery; mining colonies exploit veins of silver, copper and iron; and Guild explorers seek out First Age ruins so isolated as to remain untouched to this day.

Beyond the Firepeaks lies a fertile expanse running from the northern coast down to the provinces of An-Teng. Most of these territories lie under the Realm's sway, and are major suppliers of such crops as rice, tea, silk, cotton, opium, marijuana and qat.

The Realm's grip loosens south of An-Teng. Here grow the jungles of the Silent Crescent: wet, mazy, bright with strange flowers and weird beasts, full of wild tribes and lost cities overgrown with centuries of verdure. West of the Crescent are moorlands, marshes and islands overrun with feuding fiefdoms. Elephant-borne Guild caravans sell weapons here in exchange for such goods as betel nuts, ivory, indigo, camphor, hardwoods, cocoa beans and spices.

Beyond this region lie the haunted Violet Coast and the islands of the Lintha. Pirate ships, the raksha called the Fanged Spears, reptile-men, giant vampire moths and vendetta-prone natives are only a few of the threats imperiling trade through the region. Neither the Guild nor the Realm have made much effort to penetrate farther south.

COIN REDLARK'S VENTURE

Hearing rumors of rich lands beyond the Violet Coast, an ambitious young merchant named Coin Redlark took out loans to fund an expedition. After three years of travel, she has returned with a ship laden with ivory, silver and pepper, along with tales of even greater treasures. Past the Wailing Fen, she says, lie a thousand miles of balkanized coastal and island states where mountain dragons spit smoke and fire into the sky; and beyond those, at the edge of the Wyld, are the empires of the Three Devil Princes—a trio

of shapeshifters who rule as god-kings, within whose lands silver is as common as brass. Redlark's tale has stirred the Southwest's Guild factors into a ferment. A major expedition is likely within the year.

THE WEST

Natives gather barefoot on the white sands to watch the Guild carrack glide into the green island cove. The marines' armor and bows are strange to them. Aboard ship, red sails slacken as merchant-thaumaturges in oiled leathers pack away wind-calling bells and bring forth trade goods: glass beads, bronze knives, pots and pans, sewing needles, molasses, rum. Last come bales of woolen blankets, over which they murmur spells to keep the smallpox spirits quiescent until the bartering is done.

THE WESTERN GUILD

The Guild's presence in the West is relatively new. While established ventures in hub cities like Azure or Seahaven adhere to the Guild business culture common elsewhere in the Threshold, other enterprises are widely dispersed and highly autonomous. Such peripheral groups lack a cultural backbone; viewpoints and plans vary wildly among them. Some desire profitable, consistent trade, some prefer raiding and slave-taking, and others see opportunities for colonization or conquest.

Beyond the immediate sphere of powerful Western nations like Coral, Wavecrest and Skullstone, the lack of political interconnectedness among the islands takes the bridle off of Guild aggression. This makes privateering and private island fiefdoms feasible, but also leaves Guild fleets vulnerable to the Lintha and other pirates.

TRADING FORTS

The Guild relies on established settlements in the Threshold to serve its infrastructural needs. But the dearth of cities and towns among the West's numberless archipelagoes compels the Guild to establish its own bases of operation.

Western trading posts center around coastal fortifications built to withstand pirate attacks. Compounds walled with timber and packed earth—or stone for established, profitable sites—encircle warehouses, barracks, markets and administrative structures. Watchtowers loom over outward-jutting wharves and jetties. Even the smallest and poorest are garrisoned with mercenary archers; others employ ballistae, catapults, trebuchets, and even firedust cannons or Essence weapons. Further protection is afforded by harbor chains, fireboats, and aid from tractable elementals or gods.

Subsidiary businesses congregate around these forts: refineries for sugar, indigo, palm oil and metal ores; tanneries and textile manufactories; blacksmiths and carpenters; workshops and shipyards. Many older trading forts are towns unto themselves.

The Guild maintains missions at these sites from which thaumaturge-evangelists go forth to spread the cults of allied



Points of the Compass

gods. This is a confusing matter when preaching of gods whose portfolios are alien to the islanders. What do the folk of a tiny island understand about gods of slums, dams, oases or the minting of coins? Nonetheless, the practice persists. Untended cults grow strange and may latch onto unrelated entities.

DEMON REEF-LIGHTS

Centuries ago, when the sorceress-outcaste Farosa pioneered the Guild's exploration of the Western seas, she summoned dozens of neomah and bound them to raise their fiery bronze towers in perpetuity on bleak islets and atolls. These lighthouses serve as invaluable navigational aids, but their demon keepers have largely gone mad with isolation. Luring mariners ashore with songs and illusions, they weave mortal flesh with that of seabirds, marine creatures and their own demonic substance to create monsters.

RIDING THE TIDES

Except on a few large islands, caravans have no place in the West. Almost all settlements are on the coast, so the Guild relies on ships rather than beasts of burden. As these ships are tempting prizes, they travel in convoys for safety's sake.

A typical convoy comprises two score merchant vessels loaded with bulk cargo and escorted by a dozen warships. The flagship—usually the fastest or most powerful warship in the convoy—carries the merchant prince, the convoy god's shrine and the most valuable cargo. If the merchant prince has access to even one First Age weapon—whether it's a firelance or a lightning ballista—or the services of a sorcerer, outcaste or other supernatural assistance, that'll be aboard the flagship, maximizing the odds that the prince escapes a pirate attack even if every other ship is lost.

Many islands are too small and too far off the main shipping lanes to be worth the efforts of a convoy. Poorer islands are left to the attentions of independent merchants, but for those offering valuable goods such as pearls, gold, jade or talismans, Guild factors send their fastest ships in ones and twos and hope for the best.

THE PHOENIX WOMEN

While female sailors taking ship to the West need not join the Tya in order to do their jobs—female outsiders are socially regarded as men, as the Tya are—they must still deal with the storm mothers' hatred. Some do become Tya, but alternatives exist for those unwilling to take on the tattoos and sterility of that order.

The blessing of Rudhira the Storm Rider, goddess of all Western ships, shields women with naturally red hair from the storm mothers' malice. Red-haired female sailors from elsewhere in the Threshold go West for this reason; Western



captains recognize their value and pay them handsomely for their presence. Other sailing women dye their hair with henna and pretend it's natural, trusting that neither shipmates nor storm mothers will spot the difference. Westerners marvel at the prevalence of these "phoenix women" and whisper that they're descendants of the Scarlet Empress.

Few storm mothers hate all women. Most are simply jealous of those they deem beautiful. (Some are likewise jealous of good-looking men, putting handsome male sailors in peril.) These elementals may be propitiated with paeans to their nonexistent beauty, or by wearing veils or cutting one's hair. Only a few demand blood sacrifices.

PIRACY

Western trading vessels outnumber those elsewhere in Creation by an order of magnitude. Western piracy is likewise prevalent. Even before the Empress' disappearance caused the Realm to withdraw its patrols, the vastness of the sea spread those patrols too thin to safeguard maritime trade. Furthermore, when Western economies shift from subsistence to cash crops—spices, indigo, drugs—to supply the Guild, their impoverished populations are more prone to engage in piracy. Organized corsairs like Coral's freebooters or the Lintha can be politically powerful while they endure, which can be for decades or centuries. They act as states in their own right, extorting revenues from governments, communities and mercantile organizations.

The Guild stands on both sides of the issue. Guild slavers find piracy an ideal method for slave-taking—not to mention striking blows against mercantile rivals like the Denzik. But they must likewise invest money and blood to protect themselves against the Lintha and other seaborne raiders through combat, tribute or painstakingly negotiated secret alliances.

Lenala Odeen, a merchant prince based out of the Chelenarisi Islands—a plutocratic theocracy a thousand miles northwest of the Wavecrest Archipelago—has dedicated herself to hunting pirates for profit. She takes an artist's joy in weaving the illusion of an underprotected convoy to lure raiders in, with cargo vessels riding low in the water due to holds full of marines and decks laden with disguised siege weapons. While booty found on pirate vessels makes a nice bonus, the real payoff comes from taking pirate vessels as prizes—and selling defeated pirates to the Fair Folk.

In his offices in Gullcrest on the island of Abalone, factor Ull Nahar hawks betel juice into a porcelain spittoon whenever the Lintha are spoken of and offers large bounties for their scalps. But once a month, in the dead of night, he travels to a hidden cove south of town to meet the Lintha captain Gajui Nei. Secretly, he is the pirate's fence—and her lover.

OTHER OCEANIC PERILS

The seas swarm with inhuman threats to trade. Behemoths and lesser sea-monsters drag ships into the deep. Elementals like the storm mothers raise squalls and tempests

if they're not placated. The eel-like nenekuru, or 'sea-singers,' weave music that draws mortals overboard to drown. Western merchants can do little to avoid such dangers; they must trust in the aid of their convoy-gods and be ready to sacrifice mortal lives to save the fleet.

MARITIME COMMERCE

Guildsmen traveling into the West bring all manner of finished goods—weapons, tools, ingots, clothing—and return laden with Western luxuries. These include pearls, nacre, coral, shell, sharkskin, sea ivory, sea silk, furs, hardwoods and ambergris. The West also provides raw textiles like cotton and jute, assorted oils, and a variety of foodstuffs such as salt fish, rice, coconut, mango, tamarind and sugar cane.

Drugs travel both ways in the Western trade. Kola nut, kava, marijuana and tobacco grow in the West; many grow wild and can be easily harvested by the natives, such that the Guild must bring in foreign drugs to establish a market. Notably, Southwestern betel nut has grown so popular that the red-stained mouth of a betel user is seen on some islands as a sign of beauty.

But what dominates Western Guild activity is the spice trade. The jungle islands of the southern West are thick with cinnamon, cassia, nutmeg and clove, not to mention cardamom, mustard, ginger, cumin, pepper, and chilies. There, Guild ships can fill their holds with raw spices to sate the palates of the Scarlet Dynasty and the Threshold.

RAIDING AND SLAVING

The West is a major source of slaves for the Guild. Western islanders have a reputation for being peaceful, easy to capture and psychologically unsuited to prolonged resistance. When visiting isles with little long-term trading value, many merchant princes are inclined to take slaves—often by the simple expedient of inviting curious natives to see the interior of a cargo hold and then locking them inside. (This can cause strife when the island in question is another Guild merchant's trading partner.)

Some merchant princes take matters a step further. Instead of bringing slaves elsewhere to sell, they establish work camps and plantations on isolated islets, setting themselves up as petty tyrants. Here, slaves have no hope of rescue or escape. Some drown themselves; others try to swim away, which amounts to the same thing. Those who pray for aid find the local small gods suborned or evicted by the Guild's divine allies. Bargains for escape must be made with other powers—sea gods, elementals, sea demons or monsters.

CURRENCY OR ITS LACK

In much of the West, commerce is a luxury or a matter for ritual rather than a necessity of life. The rarity of metals and metallurgy further limit the natural appearance of coinage. Native Western currencies are typically natural things like cowries or pearls. Many islands have no currency at all, such that trade relies on ritual, obligation or prestige rather than money.

When the Guild came to Woya Antauleh, they had difficulty trading with the militant tribes of that large, verdant isle, but they have taken the measure of the local customs. Gifts to the leading clans have established the local Guildhouse as a clan of sorts, and on Woyan festival days they participate in ritual gift-exchanges between clans that elevate the givers' prestige. They receive such valuables as pearls, jade, ivory and slaves in exchange for masses of cheap bulk goods such as flour and bronze tools, and are esteemed by the Woyans in the bargain.

As a rite of passage in the Smokewise Islands, youths in bark canoes convey ceremonial garments—sewn with shells, nacre and pearls—between that archipelago's far-flung atolls. Learning of this practice, an impoverished Guild merchant named Erlen Echo procured a small fishing boat, hired on a couple of marines, and started intercepting those canoes. Selling the pearls and their young couriers has proven profitable enough for Erlen to consider expanding her operation.

THE COWRIE TRADE

The red-shelled cowrie is key to Western commerce. The arrival of the dirham has not displaced it. This is due to its sacral nature. By law and custom, many goods and services—the cattle of Oldvent, the golden sea-silk of Aulamisa, dowries in the Neck and iron weapons on Charser's Palm—may only be purchased with cowries. To do so with silver or jade is forbidden.

The cowrie gods have no intention of surrendering their relevance to Western trade. The Directorate has no official stance on the matter, but long-term efforts to destabilize the cowrie are underway. Guild factor Gannet Brisk has invested heavily in mollusk aquaculture projects ironically situated in the island chain called the Cowries. Success will allow his workers to literally pull money from the sea, while devaluing the cowrie over time. Meanwhile, his pet alchemist works to develop more virulent compounds to poison native cowrie beds.

ISLAND OF THE SAND-EATERS

Opo Nukue, a large, isolated atoll in the far West, is home to the Sand-Eaters, a Wyld-warped folk who can only draw nourishment from earth and stone. When not propitiating local gods and elementals with dance and song, they comb the beaches for tasty pebbles and plumb the central lagoon for pearls and nacre—their finest native delicacies. A ruling council of priestess-elders controls the pearl reserves, manufactures thaumaturgical pessaries for population control and passes judgment on those who violate the people's laws, such as the injunction against devouring the sacred ground of the atoll itself.

The Denzik found Opo Nukue three decades ago and established a profitable trade, offering tools and new foodstuffs—in this case, gemstones and various non-native rocks—for the Sand-Eaters' pearls and nacre. But for the past two years, the merchant prince Trayva Seven Timbers has

sailed to Opo Nukue scant weeks ahead of the Denzik city-ship, buying up the Sand-Eaters' entire supply of trade pearls in exchange for a hold brimming with gravel and glass beads.

MINING THE GRAND AMANUTA

What appears as an oval island swathed in foliage is actually a behemoth. Jungle plants encrust the Grand Amanuta's turtle-backed shell; beneath the waves, its myriad tentacles cram seaweed, squid and fish into an austrech-like maw. For centuries it wandered the Western waters unchallenged. Then the Guild discovered a way to use it for profit.

Once a year, the merchant prince Bronze Plume sails just afore of the Grand Amanuta and casts overboard a whale carcass crammed with enough black tar opium to supply a small city for a year. Upon devouring the bait, the behemoth falls into a weeks-long coma, during which Guildsmen peel away tons of its shell's outer layers. Largely used in lighter-than-water armor for marines or powdered as an aphrodisiac, the shell material has countless other mundane, medicinal and thaumaturgical uses.

The Grand Amanuta grows temperamental due to repeated opium withdrawal. It has taken to destroying ships that cross its path, and its route drifts closer to active shipping lanes.

LUNA'S SORROW

Ila-Sharyu is one of countless small islands rising between the Neck and Wavecrest. Its people once made monthly pilgrimage up the tangled green slopes of the mountain Cradle-of-Autumn to the grove called Luna's Sorrow, where moonlight ripples like water and teardrops turn into spheres of solid silver. When the Guild learned of the place's power, it sent ships to enslave the people of Ila-Sharyu, herding them up to Luna's Sorrow and torturing them to wring silver from their eyes. Revolts and infected wounds took their toll on the population, requiring the regular importation of new slaves.

The factor Raia of Windgate recently bought out and overhauled the operation, selling the remaining slaves and replacing them with coffles of the dream-eaten. Onions and capsicum are smeared on their eyes to stimulate a steady flow of tears. Reducing the death toll and removing the need for guards has made Luna's Sorrow more profitable and—in Raia's view—more humane.

THE DEEPS

The vast majority of the West lies beneath the waves. There, amid sargasso forests and abyssal plains, inhuman beings make their homes. Sea dragons, their brows crowned with huge black pearls, oversee meetings of elemental courts in caverns ablaze with Essence lamps. Silt billows up as demjen direct minions of living metal to loot the wreckage of sunken ships. Pelagotheropes sculpt ornaments from coral and shell in their towers of kelp-draped stone. These benthic peoples have access to great wealth—wealth that the Guild would claim a share of.





The most notorious site for dealing with such creatures cannot be properly called a trading post. Narwhal's Horn is a narrow sliver of gray rock that juts out of the sea at a sharp angle. There, Guild ships that wish to deal with the fallen race of the pelagials inscribe messages on iron plaques and cast them into the water. If the pelagial lord who dwells in those depths—his name unknown even to those who have dealt with him—is amenable, he sends a vessel of coral and brass to the surface to accept the slaves and raw metals the Guild offers. He provides in exchange whatever treasure suits his whim.

AMPHIBIOUS CARAVANS

In the West, there are hundreds of inhabited islands separated by shallow channels and coral-dense lagoons, and surrounded by rocky shores. Tightly arrayed islands present a challenge to both caravan and trade ship; a caravan costs too much to move across a fifty mile stretch of island only to end at the ocean, and where trade ships cannot navigate around a barrier to reach interior islands, caravans cannot be ferried to the next shore. In these places, the caravan takes on a very unique appearance. Wagons are omitted entirely. Instead, the Guild puts islanders to work building ramp and pulley networks across islands, and then pays them to pull boats over hills, through forests, and up mountains, crossing islands and selling Guild wares from the cargo holds of ships wherever they stop. Then, when a ship reaches the far shore, it returns to the water, floating across to an island that it wouldn't have been able to reach otherwise. In this manner, Guild caravans make their way through the numerous, tiny island chains throughout the West, spreading goods from faraway lands, trading in drugs and exposing remote people to foreign culture, language, and Guild coin.

THE NORTH

In the frozen reaches, little is stable: Nomadic tribes migrate like the beasts they hunt, and shift their ranges as they war on each other; petty kingdoms rise and fall; Wyld storms and banks of frozen fog can transform whole provinces, or move them hundreds of miles. The Guild must wrench profit from the North by raw force, as it brings commerce to a cold frontier.

MAMMOTH HO!

The Guild's wagons just don't work in the North. Few roads survive from the First Age, and fewer were built in

the Second. Long-established caravan routes connect the Scavenger Lands to Cherak, Wallport, Whitewall and the Saltspire League. The newest road leads to Shanarinara—if you can call a muddy, rutted track beaten out by thousands of yeddim a road. Another track leads from Whitewall through Fella and the Black Crag Mountains to Gethamane. (Landslides destroyed the First Age road from Ondar Shambal to the City of the Mountain Gateway.) Going offroad, thawing ground turns soft and muddy in summer, trapping wagon wheels. In winter, snowdrifts pile higher than yeddim and even those hardy beasts die in the cold.

Fortunately, the North offers the mammoth as an alternative. A mammoth thrives on a diet of spruce needles and sedge grass, and survives all but the harshest cold. Away from the main roads, therefore, Guild caravans take the form of long lines of pack mammoths. Some beasts carry loads of cargo wrapped in oilcloth. Others bear howdahs for the merchants and collapsible yurts for the caravan staff—sheltering caravanserais are few and far between. One mammoth bears the caravan god's shrine on its back. When faced with danger, a mammoth herd's instinct is to form a circle and present attackers with a wall of stabbing tusks and stomping feet. If that isn't enough, every tenth mammoth carries a ballista.

Breeding mammoths has not proven economical, so they must be captured and tamed. Mammoths are harder to tame than Southern elephants, but the Guild found a way to ease the process. Some icewalker shamans know the chant the Mammoth Avatar uses to call her children to new migration paths. The chant is a Procedure from the thaumaturgic Art of Husbandry. Persuasive Guildsmen wangled the secret from the shamans long ago. At the caravan-master's cry of "Mammoth Ho!" the mahouts begin the chant and their beasts fall into line, raising their trunks to trumpet at the end of each verse. As a bonus, wild mammoths sometimes follow the caravan and are taken for taming.

From the Guild's scattered caravanserais, small-time traders fan out in reindeer-drawn sledges to deal with Northern villages, tribes and kinglets. In exchange for tools, cloth and other city-made goods, they collect furs, mammoth and walrus ivory, cloudberry wine and other Northern goods. Northern voyageurs even hunt for Wyld pockets that might hold unmelting ice, raw moonsilver and other uncanny treasures.

IKALINEN

The longest mammoth caravan journeys take place in the Northeast, where the tundra and taiga stretch for thousands of miles. The merchant prince Ikalinen is one of the region's most experienced and successful caravaneers as well as a skilled thaumaturge. She has worked for 30 years with the same caravan god, a mask who adopted the name of Radiant Squirrel. Together they have traveled from Fort Bear in the Haslanti League to the White Marshes in the Wyld. Radiant Squirrel's prophetic powers have saved Ikalinen from danger countless times.

INTO THE WHITE

On the frozen plains, visibility shifts through spectrums of blindness, whiteout conditions trading places with total darkness. Often a northern caravan travels blind, guided through dark and flying snow by glowstones swallowed by bioluminescent elementals. When a blizzard looms, the caravan master blows a note on a horn, signaling the order to fort down. Workers then use plow-pushing mammoths to build windbreaks, while others hurriedly erect a small city of igloos. In the depths of the frozen North, survival is about making short distances between blizzards and praying they don't last.

Repeated clashes with Tear Eaters convinced Ikalinen she needed to learn more about these tribes, and about the dead they revere. She found that Tear Eater shamans can be bought, same as everyone else. Ikalinen learned more than she expected about the Tear Eaters' mistress, the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears, and about what dead colleagues are doing in the Underworld. Ikalinen now wants to leave the Northeast—and maybe the Guild as a whole.

RIVERFAIR

With relatively few options for hub cities, the Guild sometimes builds its own. Riverfair occupies a natural spot for a trading post where the Elk River joins the Rimewash, one of the largest rivers of the central North. Silverholders can follow Rimewash tributaries down from the Dehennan Mountains with loads of silver, copper, tin and iron. The Elk leads to Fella. The Rimewash Gap between the Dehennan and Black Crag Mountains leads to Serrat and other coastal states. During winter, Haslanti iceships easily sail the frozen Rimewash inland to Riverfair. Mammoth, reindeer and other wildlife migrate along the valley; icewalker tribes follow them, and for all their barbarian pride they want silverhold steel and Serrat cloth. Artisans follow traders; farmers follow artisans. Homes and shops join the warehouses and mammoth stables. The trading post is rapidly growing into a city.

The Guild's man in charge calls himself a mayor rather than a merchant prince. Nevertheless, Zenet Zentus is one of the Guild's best men at trading with icewalkers. As a young voyageur, he challenged a chief to a contest: Who would hold his hand the longest in a fire? Zentus won. No icewalker would call a merchant honorable, but they concede the Guildsman's courage when they see the gnarled, scarred claw on Zentus' left wrist. The barbarians might feel differently if they knew Zentus used a pain-deadening elixir during the trial, and medical alchemy to keep the hand. Or maybe not. No matter what, cooking your own hand to prove a point is hard-core.

Only one problem inhibits Riverfair's growth: It's such a perfect spot for a trade city that one already exists. The Great Contagion hit the Shogunate city of Naldestra in the middle of winter and not one person survived. The mortal city rotted away, but its ghost appears every night in the shadowland a few miles downstream from Riverfair. Zentus pays a small fortune every year for the Guild's exorcists to maintain the wards on Riverfair's walls and gates, and nobody travels by night. He keeps a cold-eyed Chernozem named Blackburn on retainer for clean-up operations on those nights when blizzards damage the wards and the dead come to visit. If any Guildsman suggests opening trade with Naldestra, Zentus says he sees no better way to provoke an icewalker alliance to destroy Riverfair. And then his enforcers beat the fool senseless to make sure the lesson is learned.

THE TREASURE TRADE

Common folk in the North want the Guild's city-made tools and medicines, but tribal chiefs and kinglets want treasures they can flaunt before their people or give each other as gifts and ransoms. In towns such as Wallport or Riverfair, Guild artisans turn raw silver, gold, gems and ivory into brooches, goblets, sword-hilts and crowns. They study tribal motifs and refine them into new forms of quasi-barbaric splendor. For all their disdain of the Guild, the icewalker tribes near Riverfair rely on it completely for their ornaments and treasures. The process is well underway in other parts of the North as well. Many of the North's petty kings also buy Guild-made treasures for three times their weight in raw materials.

The biggest recent commission, though, came from the Woolly Rhinoceros Avatar, who hired Riverfair artisans to build an entire cult center worthy of a kingdom's patron god. This came as news to the king... who still ended up paying for the work.

BIRKARLERS

The visitors to Riverfair include soldiers of fortune called Birkarlers. These military adventurers—bandits, really—head into the Northern interior to find some tribe, village or kinglet with loot worth taking. They conquer it and sell loot to the Guild. The Birkarlers' captain may become the new kinglet, or the company might sell the people as slaves and move on to other conquests.

Birkarlers usually come from the coastal countries, though a goodly fraction come from the Realm: Captains are sometimes disgraced Dynasts or patricians. Once they reach the interior, though, they rely on the Guild to resupply them, to the point they become Guild mercenaries in all but name. When local folk won't deal with the Guild on the Guild's terms, a merchant prince can sometimes point a Birkarler company at them.

Ragara "Nosetaker" Norizon, a Realm patrician exiled for rape and murder, is the Guild's most reliable Birkarler partner in the Rimewash area. He has destroyed two icewalker tribes and overthrown three petty kingdoms, installing lieutenants





as Guild-friendly new kings. Zentus detests the Nosetaker, but cannot deny his utility. Norizon, in turn, has a long-term partnership with a bloody hand—a small god of murder—who protects him from hostile spirits. Norizon maintains a small shrine to his partner in Riverfair, and adorns it with trophies from his victims.

THE SHIPYARD

Riverfair's latest addition is a shipyard. Iceships work so well for the Haslanti that Northern factors decided the Guild needs its own fleet. (The Guild previously used iceships bought or taken from the Haslanti.) The first Guild-made squadron sailed down the frozen Rimewash in RY 766 and returned laden with walrus ivory, sealskin and gems from White Sea islands. Where the Haslanti and icewalkers were strong, they traded. Where other folk were weak, they raided. The hierarchs currently debate the value of an intensive campaign of piracy against the Haslanti: While the Guild profits handsomely through trade with the Haslanti, some members want to humble the League for its past rebellion against Guild lords.

Zentus is under orders to triple the shipyard's size. To do that, he needs more money than local trade can provide. The mayor of Riverfair now deals with the North's oldest and richest Guild factor, a man who built his fortune on money itself.

MONEY AND ITS MASTER

The Dehennan Mountains hold mining camps called silverholds. The Coindelving is a silverhold the way Juggernaut is a large animal. It is one of the largest silver mines in Creation, its shafts and galleries running for miles beneath an ice-clad peak.

From the surface, the Coindelving doesn't look like much: merely clusters of stone cottages and goat barns scattered over a snowy mountainside, each clump surrounding a tunnel into the earth. A rather plain granite chalet rises near the largest entrance. A caravanserai sprawls at the foot of the mountain a mile downslope.

Every day, hundreds of men troop into the mine. Before starting work, they kneel before images of Argenthonios, god of silver; Yin Yuan, goddess of coins; and Rodavango, a lesser elemental dragon of fire. They pray that these three spirits bless them, the mine and the Guild.

Tram-cars carry tons of ore each day to the refinery and mint in the center of the mine. Pits of eternal flame cast flickering orange light through the vaulted chamber. Sweating men in leather aprons haul great crucibles to and fro. Cast-iron dragon-heads vomit molten silver into molds for ingots. Other men strain to turn the cranks of new Varang-made presses that stamp the silver into coins. Every hour, they pour another bucket of dinars before a flame-eyed dragon whose eyes blaze brighter as he inspects their handiwork... and a cheer rises as Rodavango pronounces the dinars excellent, another credit to the men of the Coindelving!

Every man in town wants to work in the mint. It's *warm*, even when the winter snow buries the entire village. The pay's good, too, and they eat well (if they don't mind staying in debt to the Guild's company store). They have the honor of working with the mighty spirit who supplies the flames for the smelters and forges. Bandits don't attack the Coindelving—not after what Rodavango did to the last ones who tried.

The dragon, however, is not the master of the Coindelving. He is merely the highest-ranking employee of the Guild factor Chall Turpin, the resident of the stone chalet.

Seven decades ago, Turpin was an up-and-coming merchant prince from Cherak. By most standards, the Chall family was rich. Young Turpin realized, however, that Cherak's Dragon-Blooded lords would never permit him to gain power equal to their own. He took his inheritance early and used it to buy his way into the Guild.

Turpin advanced to factor because of a crisis: Too much of the Guild's silver was stolen between the refineries and the mint in Wallport. Turpin solved the problem by placing the mint and refinery inside the largest mine. As a skilled priest and trader, he recruited Rodavango to protect the facility as well as heat the smelters. A bit of shrewd deception and the help of other hired spirits lured the silver thieves—led by a trio of outcaste Terrestrial Exalted—into a trap. Turpin keeps their skulls, plated in silver, on his desk.

Over the decades, Turpin expanded his operation to other silverholds. He has bought and bound a cadre of air elementals to transport silver from other holds along the length of the Dehennan chain. When the holders have a load of ingots ready, they light a thaumaturgic candle to alert one of the Guild's bound spirits. In payment, the elemental receives the silverhold's prayers for the rest of the month.

Chall Turpin is now one of the Guild's richest members in the North. With no magical powers of his own, he commands a small army of elemental couriers and minor silver-gods who steadily extend the veins of ore. He has wealth, respect, offspring who followed him into the Guild (including a God-Blooded granddaughter sired by Rodavango), and work that he truly loves. His only sorrow is that he is 120 years old. Despite age-staving cordial and longevity-blessings from various gods, he soon must die.

The solution is obvious. Turpin must become a god—the god of the Coindelving, so he can manage it forever. Other mortals have become gods. If a mere *minstrel* such as Talespinner from Great Forks can pull it off, it can't be too hard for one of Creation's most persuasive business-priests. Turpin calls in markers from all the spirits who owe him favors, searching for the god and the leverage that can elevate him to divinity.

THE GREAT ICE AND BEYOND

For all the interest in contesting Haslanti dominance on the White Sea, Guild leaders see iceships—and, eventually,



Wyld

airboats—as only a stepping-stone to greater treasures located even further north. Gods and elementals have their uses, but the Fair Folk can give wealth beyond the dreams of avarice; and while the Winter Folk of the intermediate North supply treasures of glamour in exchange for mortal blood and souls, the greater fae households lie in the distant Wyld. Just as importantly, feathersteel ore—iron rendered lightweight and rustproof by Air essence and the Wyld—is extremely rare south of the White Sea.

A few Guildsmen don't wait for the new air boats. They already cross the Great Ice using sleighs and dogsleds. These caravans are tiny compared to the mighty convoys of the Scavenger Lands. There might be just a dozen or so Guild personnel, and as many guards: You don't worry about bandits on the Great Ice. The Guild calls upon its most powerful, experienced and loyal caravan gods for these ventures. Dragon-Blooded soldiers of fortune can write their own tickets.

The Guild used to need guards for the slaves it took North to the Fae courts. When they knew their destination, some slaves sought clean deaths in the cold. Now the Guild just doses its living cargo with an alchemical draught called Bear Sleep Elixir, wraps them up and lets them slumber through most of the journey.

The merchant prince Four Spruce Cooperson recently started using Wyld mutants as caravan guards and personnel.

He met the Ice Seal tribe and opened trade with them while prospecting Wyld pockets; the Wyld treasures he obtained financed his rise to merchant prince. The furred mutants don't feel cold—ideal for the Great Ice. Four Spruce sees his Ice Seal employees as people to a far greater degree than the sleepers he delivers to the Onyx Court.

Half the sleds and sleighs just carry provisions for men and beasts. As the traders empty each vehicle, they chop it up for firewood and slaughter the animals for food. On the way north, the Guildsmen and the dogs eat reindeer. On the way back, the Guildsmen eat the dogs. Such expediences permit travel at remarkable speed. When the aurora shines brightly enough, the caravan even travels at night. The faster a caravan crosses the ice, the less its chance of encountering ice hollows, carnivorous moths or other horrors.

The Great Ice slowly shifts and breaks, threatening to leave Guild caravans adrift on the ocean, or facing an impassable strait. Tamers with the ancient secret of the icecry use their special woodwinds to call krakens to hold up sections of ice, allowing caravans to cross ocean gaps that would otherwise be impassible. At last the ice gives way to stranger terrain: frozen forests, upside-down mountains, rivers of fast-flowing ice with crystal fish and birds. In pursuit of profit, the Guild travels beyond Creation's rim and deals with entities stranger and more terrible than any mere god.



CHAPTER THREE

CHAINS OF NO IRON

Creation is controlled by immense and mercurial powers that care little for the plights of men. The Guild knows this. Moreover, it knows the wealth and power that can be had by making customers of such incredible beings. Thus, the Guild finds an easy trade with the horrors of the Wyld, where the motivations of Rakshastan form an eerie reflection of the Guild's own. But by selling their way into power, the Guild has committed many sins, and the chain it has forged in life has become ponderous.

THE FAIR FOLK AND THE GUILD

Though savants know the world has borders, to a child's eye, Creation goes on without end. Even when that child grows up to be a Guildsman, Creation is a range farther than the eye can see—a range he must travel to make a profit, and a profit he must make at peril, for Creation teems with deadly monsters, hostile lands, and spirits jealous of men who live as gods. Yet the Guildsman is hardened to these facts. He accepts them. He must. For his trade does not carry

him around these things; such entities are often his clients.

Across Creation, caravans and slave-ships commissioned by Guild coin are stocked with human cargo and sent out to the farthest reaches of the world. Merchant princes sell dream-eaten slaves—men and women reduced to living automatons—in almost every marketplace in Creation. Guildsmen who grew up listening to ghost stories and tales of monsters now sit down with those same monsters to make a profit. Fortunes are won, and countless lives lost. This is the Guild's business with the Wyld.

DREAMS OF AVARICE

The Guild's history with the raksha goes back as far as the Guild itself. When merchant princes first pushed their caravans and trading ships to the far edges of Creation, they caught the glimmering, wicked eyes of the Fair Folk. Soon they found themselves followed by otherworldly chimes and eerie pipings, the sounds of raksha at hunt. Early meetings between Guildsmen and fae were marked by violence, the

savage dance of predator and prey. Raksha came into Guild camps as obsidian jackals and swirling vortices of teeth, or as seductive youths clad in porcelain and poetry. Whole caravans were swallowed up by the hungry Fair Folk, bodies maimed and souls devoured. But not always. Sometimes, the Fair Folk came peacefully to visit the Guild's caravans, or invited merchant princes into their domains to enjoy faerie hospitality. As years went by, the Guild studied the fae through these interactions, learning more and more of their strange visitors. The minds of the merchant princes turned, as they inevitably do, towards profit.

Weaving the Wyld into the Guild's web of commerce would not prove easy. Even when merchant princes were able to attract raksha to their caravans, avoid being ravished, seduced, or murdered, and sit down to bargain with the fae, they were unable to strike a successful bargain. The Fair Folk simply had no experience with commerce or the trade of material wealth. Their freeholds were governed by social economies of favors and obligations; the strange coins of the merchant princes meant nothing to them. If the Guild was to trade with the raksha, they would have to find a way to teach them the most basic precepts of wealth and exchange, to convince them that the Guild's money held a power of its own.

Countless traders and merchant princes sought a way to open commerce with the Wyld. Few found success. Often, the Guildsmen's efforts ended in disaster. The merchant prince Anuneki Utu brought a raksha noble to see the markets of Nexus as a practical demonstration of commerce. The faerie devoured more than one hundred souls that day, Anuneki's included, and was stopped only by the Emissary's intervention. Factor Dogen Ayano assembled a mercenary army to conquer and colonize a raksha freehold, hoping to force trade through military might. His forces mutinied and killed him only a few hours after first entering the Bordermarches. Zal Zäl, a hierarch of the Directorate, spent a fortune in silver on dreamstones, filling the gems with memories culled from savants and scholars of economics. Dozens of caravans brought these dreamstones to the raksha, to see if the knowledge they contained might spread and infect the Fair Folk. When this scheme failed, Zal Zäl had his savants fed to the fae, to see if their learning might be more infectious firsthand (alas, no). Such failures proved instructive for the Guild, teaching them that the Fair Folk must be feared and respected before they could be exploited.

But despite these early setbacks, the Guild persisted. Canny merchant princes turned their slave cargoes into currency, staking their negotiations on the rakshas' hunger for human souls. While the Fair Folk still made dangerous and capricious trade partners, the profits won by the survivors of this early commerce sparked a firestorm of change within the Guild. Factors scrambled to establish new ventures for trading with the Wyld, while coded missives and caravanserai rumor spread the stories of triumphant merchants, and the techniques they used to bargain with the fae. The heroes

of these stories were lionized in the Guild's history. Mno Moraki, at seventeen years old, won a fortune from the Ogre King with nothing more than her wits, her smile, and her arsenal of experimental thaumaturgic wards. The ruthless slaver captain Marissa Seventh-Moon wielded the threat of starvation like a weapon, forcing oaths and treaties on freeholds throughout the whole Western Wyld. Ice-on-the-Petals, scion of a barbarian border tribe, wove a potent narrative of trade from the indigenous folklore and oral traditions of his people, creating a magical story-pattern that lured raksha into commerce. Factor Li Fang waged a veritable war of academic acquisition throughout the Scavenger Lands to secure countless Shogunate-era texts on the Fair Folk, beginning the Guild's vast library of Wyld-lore. Men and women such as these are the forefathers of today's Guildsmen, the founders of a legacy of wealth. As the caravans of this daring handful of heroes returned from the Bordermarches weighted down with gossamer treasures, they brought with them the dawn of a new era for the Guild—an age of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

FINDING THE FREEHOLDS

Merchant princes in search of a wandering manor bring with them a Five-Feather Jewel, a sparkling carnelian cut into the shape of a feather and inscribed with ornate spiral patterns. These jewels exude a subtle magical resonance that the Fair Folk can sense from hundreds of miles away, marking their bearers as emissaries of the Guild in Rakshastan. As long as a jewel-bearer's caravan can come within a few days' travel of the freehold he seeks, the goblin-folk of the place will come to guide him in. The first Five-Feather Jewels were gifts from the raksha, but the cunning thaumaturges of the Guild have long since learned how to replicate them. The procedure needed to create one of these magical talismans belongs to the Art of Enchantment (3, Intelligence, 3, 100 hours).

The Fair Folk have no need for these trinkets. Errant freeholds might confound the sextants and compasses of Guildsmen, but not the narrative magic of faerie quests. Thanks to the tireless research of the Guild and the commerce tales they've woven over the centuries, any raksha who wishes trade with the Guild can automatically perceive which of the journeys stemming from the waypoint she occupies leads to the nearest manor.

THE GOBLIN MARKETS

Stepping into the secret strongholds of the Guild's trade with the raksha, one enters into a world both alien and human, horrific and familiar. Here the maddening nightmares of the Wyld meet the cold calculations of the Guild; here



impossible wonders are bought and sold with mortal coin. The sickly-sweet scent of gossamer mingles with the pleasant aroma of dried spices and yeddim-sweat as hobgoblins guide a Guild caravan through secret maze-ways. A coffle of slaves trembles as an elephant-headed Panjandrum emerges, followed by a dancing retinue of sinisterly angled maidens. A merchant prince snacks on dried banana chips as he haggles with an undying monster clothed in living faces. The Guild has come far since the first days of its trade with the mad lords of Rakshastan. Experimentation and uncertainty have been replaced with tested and proven techniques. Chance encounters on the Bordermarches have given way to civilized houses of diplomacy and trade, the faerie manors where Guildsmen meet and parley with the Fair Folk.

One of these fae manors stands in each corner of Creation; the fifth wanders between pockets of the Wyld that haunt the mortal world. Their locations are inconstant, changing with the new moon or with the whim of their faerie master. The Wreath of Lashes haunts the deserts of the Southern Bordermarches, a brazen spire guarded by lions of burning obsidian and hideous scorpion-children. The Embrace of Ash and Yew towers over the skyline of the Eastern Wyld, a citadel carved into the living wood of two titanic, intertwined trees. The crystal palace called the Mouth of White Sleep receives Northern caravans in its cold chambers; to accept the bear-pelt blankets or warm hearths offered by its faerie hosts is fatal. The Surgeon's Deep is cut into an immortal whale-behemoth skewered by great spears of gossamer, the pleasure-chambers of the Western fae carved into its undying flesh and bone. The Fragrant Hill roams the Wyld places of the world, redolent with incense-bearing grasses; its cavernous depths abound in luminous gems and living metals. While these five freeholds are governed by their raksha masters, the Guild has negotiated binding oaths that fall upon all fae who make their abode in these houses of trade. Within these havens, merchant princes can talk and deal without fear of faerie betrayal—though this does not stop the cautious from carrying hidden caches of protective talismans and contraband iron weapons. Outside the five manors, Wyld trade still occurs, mostly between merchant princes and raksha who have cultivated personal relationships. However, such meetings carry greater risks for the Guildsmen, and so are far less profitable in the estimation of the factors.

ECONOMIES OF MADNESS

Mortal slaves are, naturally, the coin of the realm in Rakshastan. Guild caravans and slave-ships bring in chained masses of men and women from all across Creation, slaves of every race and tribe. Most feed the monstrous hungers of the raksha, their mortal virtues stripped away and devoured. Others meet stranger fates—twisted into chimeric grotesques, shaped into baroque ornaments of flesh, or possessed by ethereal fae. But slaves are not the Guild's only offerings. While material goods offer little to the princes of madness, a raksha's fancy can sometimes be caught by a song, a poem,

THE HOSPITALITY OF TIGERS

No Guildsman who enters in to one of the five manors need fear the raksha he finds within, so long as he remembers not to accept their hospitality. To enjoy even the least grape of a freehold's sumptuous fare, or one drop of its flowing wine, is to forswear all protection. Such are the terms of the peace negotiated between the Guild and the Fair Folk. The unending agonies of those who make this fatal mistake haunt the minds of those who trade with the Fair Folk, a sharp reminder of the constant dangers they face. Such is the lot of fools and incompetents in the Wyld trade.

But it is not always easy to resist the splendors and temptations of the faerie palaces. Glamour is woven into their very walls, casting a veil of wonderment over everything within. Mortals with Dodge MDVs of 4 or lower suffer an unnatural Compulsion while within the manors (two Willpower to resist each day). This pervasive mental influence compels them to remain in the freehold for as long as possible, and to offer no hostile resistance to the Fair Folk within.

or an *objets d'art*. Canny merchant princes stockpile these in hope of finding the rare fae who will be tempted by them. Magic, too, is treasured by the Fair Folk. Thaumaturgical talismans, alchemical elixirs, and minor artifacts are all sold in the halls of the faerie princes by those Guildsmen who can afford to deal in them. The raksha, in turn, offer payment to the Guild in three currencies: dream-eaten slaves, Wyld magic, and recovered artifacts of the First Age.

The dream-eaten are the soulless husks of those whose wills have been devoured by the Fair Folk, living automata devoid of identity or humanity. Such slaves need no chains, following any orders given to them with unthinking obedience. While these mindless husks make for poorer labor than healthy slaves, they are cheap, disposable, and pliant, more than making up for their clumsy work and their unnerving silence. Despots, princes, and landowners hire them en masse as construction teams and plantation laborers. Barbarian warlords and tribal chieftains use dream-eaten soldiers to wear down their enemies, sending these zombie legions ahead of their own troops. Unscrupulous alchemists and sorcerers use dream-eaten as test subjects for dangerous experiments. House Cynis discreetly offers soulless sex-puppets to clients of particular tastes, heedless of the Immaculate Order's condemnations. Dream-eaten that go unsold in the flesh markets are put to work in the Guild's whip legions, gathering opium and coca leaves for the drug harvest. But in the Guild's grand design, the dream-eaten are simply a way of recouping expenses on slaves sold to the fae. It is not for these pathetic remnants of humanity that

the Guild's merchants risk their lives and sanity, but for the magic of Rakshastan.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

More than raksha haunt the mad dreamscapes of the Wyld. Mutant cannibal tribes hunt down any mortal who sets foot on their tainted lands. Monstrous ur-hulks roam the chaos in a lonely search for their lost creators, unwittingly crushing ships and caravans in their wake. Marauding zouaves of the Scorpion Empire threaten both mortal and raksha, dragging captured prisoners back to their far-off domain. Chimerae seduce and subsume unwary Guildsmen into their vast patchwork existence. Malevolent principles of geometry enfold travelers in endless loops of twisted space. While the Guild's enchanted weapons and powerful mercenary forces afford a formidable defense, their greatest allies in dealing with these dangers have always been the Fair Folk, unwilling to lose their steady supply of human souls. With the aid of their faerie, the Guild can travel the hazardous landscapes of the Wyld with at least some assurance of safety.

Countless wonders and artifacts can be found in the treasure-halls of the Fair Folk: enchantments spun from gossamer, forgotten relics of the First Age, the regalia of heroes lost to the Wyld. While the faerie are loathe to abandon these treasures to mortal merchants and money-counters, they often have little choice when starvation and calcification loom overhead. Mighty as they might seem, the raksha are orphan princes in the lands of Creation, and the Guildsmen's take is the price of staying fed. That the Guild seeks out and targets the most desperate Creation-bound fae only increases their profits from this trade. Most of the artifacts won in the Wyld trade find powerful and wealthy buyers in Creation: the Dragon-Blooded of the Realm, the gods of Great Forks, the mysterious Deathlords. Even the coin of the Anathema is welcomed in the Guild's counting houses.

But not all of these puissant relics are sold. Some factors choose to keep certain wonders brought back by their caravans, reserving them for their own purposes or entrusting them to favored merchant princes. A single artifact can completely transform the operations of a trading company, opening the way to greater and greater profits. The caravans of Ghauli Wolf-Son are pulled through the East by a decrepit Shogunate war-golem, still sturdy enough to haul an entire wagon train. Moala Sibila smuggles drugs into Realm port cities through a faerie chancel that exists only behind mirrors and reflections. Bandits and wild beasts that fall upon the wagons of Auriki n'Asi are devoured by the miasma of man-eating shadows





that ring his caravan, a Wyld behemoth bound to his service. Merchant princes awarded such treasures are all but assured a future of vast wealth and interesting times.

But slaves and treasures are not the only things exchanged between the Guild and the Fair Folk. A border culture drawing from both mortal and raksha society flourishes among the Guild's meeting houses, taking in merchant and faerie alike. Some Guildsmen dress in faerie fashion, elaborate outfits and costumes that ape the bestial elegance and elemental splendor of the raksha. Others feast on the mutant fauna of the Wyld. Caravans carry back raksha styles of music-poetry-lovemaking (they can scarcely be distinguished), as well as the haughty dialect of Old Realm native to the fae. Sexual encounters are commonplace in the goblin markets—few Guildsmen can resist the exotic allure of a faerie lover, and fewer raksha can control their curiosity. The Fae-Blooded born of these unions are considered an asset, groomed for future service in the Guild. Actual romance between the two races is far rarer, and almost never lasts for long—although the famous marriage of Copil Chantico to the Glittering Serpent Princess stands as testament to the possibility of even the strangest loves. Above all, the Guildsmen of the Wyld trade are defined by their acceptance of the strange. Having seen and lived among the horror and splendor of the faerie world, they find themselves at home with the bizarre and grotesque, seeing humanity in even the most alien of monsters.

PROFIT AND LOSS

Every silver dinar won by the Guild in their commerce with the Wyld comes at the risk of annihilation. A fortune

FAERIE SKIN, MORTAL MASKS

The Fair Folk, too, have been changed by their commerce with the Guild. The music, poetry, and art of Creation's cultures have gained some small caché in certain freeholds, admired as exotica by faeries of deviant taste. Many fae who deal with the Guild have learned Riverspeak or other Creation-born tongues; others have adapted mortal colloquialisms into the vernacular of their native Old Realm. Stranger appropriations of mortal culture have occurred, too. The Lord of the Ebon Lash smokes opium out of an amethyst skull, sometimes visiting drug-dens in Creation for company. Nisil-of-the-Lilies receives instruction in Creation's history, mathematics, and metaphysics from a motley ensemble of mortal scholars; she is considering submitting an application to join the Guild. The faerie nobles of Polished Bone Palace have devoted their lives to shaping coins of polished purple hepatizon out of the Wyld, mimicking the shape and inscriptions of the Guild's silver currency in the belief that these are what make the tokens valuable. Even to other raksha, their purple coin economy is maddeningly strange.

vast beyond imagining has been built upon this commerce, and the Guild has learned well how to navigate its risks and dangers—but they are not perfect. Human foolishness and faerie caprice have doomed countless ventures and enterprises, ruining fortunes and lives alike. The threat of disaster hangs over the head of every merchant prince who has ever set course for the end of the world. But still the Guild plays its perilous game with the raksha, wagering everything for the promise of riches beyond reason.

Financial ruin is the least of the risks faced in the Wyld trade. A faerie princeling walks away from the bargaining table on a whim, leaving a caravan of half-dead slaves to go to waste. A mischievous Eshu misinterprets the terms of a contract, paying in dream-eaten songbirds. A merchant prince is fooled by a goblin's offer of ephemeral faerie gold. Such failures leave merchant princes empty-handed, and send factors scrabbling to recoup their expected profits—which have often already been invested in new endeavors before the caravan's return. More than one potential hierarch has been bankrupted by faerie whim, and the Guild shows no mercy to those who fail to make a profit.

But the greater danger of the Wyld trade is to life and limb (and often, sanity). While the Guild's faerie trading partners are oath-bound against violence, it's not unheard of for a raksha to break the treaty, turning instantly from amicable companion to murderous man-eater. When this happens, Guildsmen die. Merchant princes terrified of the prospect prepare themselves against it with iron, thaumaturgy, and God-Blooded bodyguards—but these are not always enough. When Seven-Eyed Heliotrope turned on her mortal partner-cum-lover, she tore through an entire mercenary company of armed badgermen to rip out his soul. The Archimandrite Perilous was destroyed by the countless wards tattooed on the merchant prince he tried to kill, but his dying curse has filled that Guildsman's sleep with alien glyphs and icy desolation ever since. How many lives have been lost to the Wyld trade? The amount is staggering. Yet it is not so great as the profit these deaths secure.

A factor's ruin or a Guildsman's demise is tragic—but only for that one man. The Guild as a whole is too vast and too wealthy to care. The true dangers of the Wyld trade come on a larger scale. All Creation knows of the Balorian Crusade. What few know is how close the Guild came to beginning a second Crusade. In RY 547, a conspiracy of factors established a secret slave citadel, Revenwald, on the outskirts of the northeastern Wyld, enslaving local tribes and selling them to the native fae. With supply and demand all in one place, the Revenwald venture cut out the cost of transportation entirely, returning immense profits—and also disaster. As Guild slavers depopulated border villages and communities, they unwittingly weakened Creation in the face of encroaching chaos. After only a few months of operation, Revenwald was swallowed up by the hungry Wyld, and Creation dissolved into chaos for miles around. A shambolic horde of raksha invaded through this breach, rampaging as far as the Threshold before

they were driven back by a coalition of the Seventh Legion, the League of Many Rivers and the Guild's mercenary forces. Even with this powerful assembly of arms, the battle was close. The Guild Directorate responded with a two-year moratorium on all commerce with the raksha, a paltry gesture in the face of near apocalypse. The Guild now closely watches all trade around the outer rim of Creation and the Bordermarches of the interior. While the Guild has not imposed any direct sanctions on the overharvesting of humans in these territories, it imposes heavy fines and sanctions on all factors operating in regions where such an outbreak occurs. For many merchant princes, the profit is worth the risk.

A final threat exists, one that haunts the most troubled dreams of the hierarchs. While they know nothing of hannya or ishvara, they know that the rise of another Balor would shake their world to its very pillars, marking the dawn of a new apocalypse. Against this doomsday, the coffers of the Guild offer little comfort. For now, the hierarchs can do little but hope and scheme. Should their nightmares ever become reality, it will be seen if mortal ingenuity and audacity can stand against the tide of Chaos. The Guild will either rise to its greatest triumph...or be destroyed for its hubris.

UNREAL CITY

What of the Guild stronghold that fell into the Wyld? While it has been all but forgotten to history and myth, the ruined citadel of Revenwald still stands in the chaos of the Bordermarches. Unwitting explorers and wandering shamans that chance upon the ruins find the fortress twisted into strange patterns of alien architecture, a sprawling cityscape of menacing spires. Whispering voices amid the rubble make tantalizing promises of hearts' desires bought and sold. A questant who buries an offering of silver will be rewarded with treasures stolen from its vaults, brought to them by the silent and slender-limbed creatures that serve the city. Stranger exchanges have happened, too—trades of secrets, dreams, even souls. As centuries have crept by, both mortal and raksha have been lured in by the seductive possibilities of Revenwald, erecting a shantytown city amid the rubble and fallen towers. But the Guild has never returned. It knows enough to fear the strange glyphs that shine on shattered towers, the cold silence of the creatures that roam the ruins, and the soulless stares of the men and women who will never leave the Unreal City again.

DEMONS AND THE GUILD

The stairway to the workshop winds deep beneath the streets. Cheap incense smolders in a brazier on a landing, mingling with the stench of fear-sweat, rotten

meat and other, alien odors. City noises from above are supplanted by sounds from below: the clang of hammers and a high, inhuman wailing. The porters creep farther down, to where lamps of green glass shine on glossy black spines that encrust the stone walls like exotic coral. Some carry ingots of pig iron; others carry cages of live rats and pigeons, the animals bristling in terror. The courtesan carries herself as best she can, though her face is white beneath its powder. But she will be paid well—if she survives—for if this Guildhouse is to profit, its demons must have their due.

Demons form a small but important part of the Guild's workforce, and Hell is likewise a minor but lucrative trading partner. Dealing with demons is risky for mortals, but can be both manageable and profitable if one takes the necessary steps—especially when one has sufficient wealth to employ Exalted sorcerers, as the Guild does.

LEARNING THE TRADE

While some demon-binders come from outside the Guild, most are selected and trained from within its ranks. Many are apprenticed to extant sorcerers and thaumaturges. Others learn their trade at one of the Guild's many occult schools.

The Guild invites master thaumaturges from across Creation to teach at the Vulpaeum in the Northeastern city of Yatakar. Anyone may study beneath the Vulpaeum's marble domes and ivy-wreathed pergolas if they can afford its prohibitive tuition. Graduates come away with a broad understanding of the occult arts, but may focus their studies on any desired topic. The Directorate awards free tuition to gifted Guildsmen; classes on demonology are largely composed of Guild apprentices.

In Nathir, the House of Thirty Seals is devoted solely to the study and practice of demonology, both thaumaturgical and sorcerous. The Guild once received favorable rates from the school in exchange for providing ritual reagents of guaranteed purity. Now it owns the place outright, and the site's forbidding granite walls—inlaid with leaden runes of an unwholesome nature—have been extended to accommodate workrooms where demons called forth by faculty and students may labor on the Guild's behalf without ever leaving the grounds.

INFERNAL PAWNS

When Guildsmen require services from supernatural beings, they prefer demons to gods or elementals. Demons have no clout in Heaven or Creation's spirit courts. They may be enslaved with few consequences, and bargaining with them rarely embroils one in supernatural politics.

The Guild holds the upper hand in most interactions with demonkind. Sorcerous binding is stronger than manacles, subtler than threats. Those called by thaumaturgy can be manipulated in other ways. Some accept payment—whether in blood, flesh, lore or other, stranger coin. Some may be seduced or blackmailed. And even demons and their kith may be dominated by the chain and the lash.



The renegade Dynastic sorcerer Avanarus the Red has perfected a method for obtaining viable offspring from mating mortals with blood-apes. The resulting hybrids are brawny and resilient, and their craving for blood can typically be met with fresh offal. His beastmasters employ harsh techniques in order to break their wills. Even so, Avanarus sells them far afield to avoid trouble if they lose control.

Suseil Glass Knife owns the Lilac-Blossom House, one of the smallest and most exclusive brothels in Nexus. There, wealthy patrons with exotic tastes pay handsomely to dally with the House's decanthrope or one of its neomah. During the day, these demon-courtesans are brought in a covered coach to another of Suseil's properties, a smithy in the Nighthammer district where heranhal craft weapons and jewelry, to ease the smith-demons' unquenchable lusts. Now, Suseil has discovered that the House's decanthrope has added the handsome body of a fellow factor's eldest son to its collection, and she will do anything to avoid blame.

INFERNAL PARTNERS

Guild membership is theoretically open to all reasoning beings, including raksha, elementals, gods and the Exalted. Of the immortal races, demons and their by-blows are most likely to join. Those with monstrous features or unnatural appetites may face discrimination, but their contributions are always valuable to someone, and a fistful of silver is infinitely preferable to the kiss of the Silent Wind.

Sedra the Scarlet was born of a prostitute and a conjured demon-smith. Demonstrating a knack for violence in her

youth, she now serves as a leg-breaker for a local Guild factor. A short, heavyset woman, her roundness conceals iron-hard muscle that allows her to swing her beloved truncheon with bone-shattering force. She passes off her ruddy skin as Western ancestry and wears special boots to hide her claw-like feet.

Misused by an outcaste merchant-sorcerer, the vitriol elemental Cho-Marsyas sought revenge in the manner of its kind. Finding its way from the Demon City into Creation, it joined the Guild in order to mirror its former summoner, and it grew in fiscal skill until it could ruin the man's fortunes before slaying him. In doing so, Cho-Marsyas made many enemies of its own, and would have been brought low had not Ezla Ravile, its boldest clerk, proposed an alternative. Ravile now speaks for the twisted creature, so only she need deal with its sulfurous stench and acrid tongue.

Three hundred years ago, the demon Makarios (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. V—The Roll of Glorious Divinity II**, pp. 65-67) visited the Guild's hierarchs in a collective dream wherein he submitted an application for Guild membership. Each hierarch awoke holding a coffer of black lead filled with hell-money, precious stones and letters of recommendation from several demon princes. Despite the irregularity, the vote on Makarios' admission was unanimous.

UNWELCOME GUESTS

Not every demon in the Guild is welcome. The Yozi grasp at any straw that might win their freedom; many demons infiltrate the Guild to gather information or hoard assets that

NEW ABCISSIC TEMPLATE: THE INGÉNUÉ (SOCIALIZE)

Slender and beautiful behind her silken veil, she approaches beneath a lilac-draped pergola. She smiles contentedly, unaware of her own horns and forked tail. An infant suckles at her breast. To her right, three masked courtiers bow to her. In seeing them, she does not see the mirror to her left. In its reflection, the unmasked courtiers point at her, jeering, while serpents dangle from the pergola in place of flowers. Her mirror-babe is a skeleton, the tiny bones of its hands and feet falling away behind her.

The Ingénue believes wholeheartedly that it belongs in Creation; that its time in Malfeas was nothing more than a long and terrible dream. Its summoner weaves a false history that, despite being tissue-thin, anchors the demon's delusion with all the solidity of stone. The Ingénue gains Limit when faced with evidence of its demonic nature or the falsehood of its memories. The sorcerer may reduce its Limit by restricting it to a controlled, scripted environment that reinforces its belief in its role.

At low Limit, the Ingénue plays its role perfectly, unaware of its true nature. As it gains Limit, cracks in its façade begin to show; memories of Malfeas creep into its dreams and assail its waking mind in moments of crisis, and its demeanor grows steadily more inhuman. At high Limit, it becomes consciously aware of the holes in its memory and takes action to find the truth.

Limit Break: Flight of Despair: The demon recoils in horror from its alien nature. It absconds at the first opportunity and flees for (Socialize) days, seeking a place of desolation where no mortal can witness its shame.

Limit Break: Smash the Cracked Mirror: Enraged by the deception perpetrated upon it, the demon vents its fury upon things its master values that remind it of the lie—mortals of their acquaintance, places they have frequented and possessions that have passed between them. Its summoner is exempt from direct harm. This fit of temper continues until the Ingénue kills or ruins (Socialize) targets.

Elemental Ingénues: This profile applies only to demons.

might aid the Reclamation. Others serve their own agendas but prefer to hide their presence from the Guild's wardens.

Beckoned by a Marin Bay merchant-thaumaturge who sought aid in becoming a factor, the chrysogona Anasesem has counseled one Guildsman after another for eleven years, climbing the ladder until she stands as a hierarch's hidden left hand. Now she whispers of assassination and consolidation to her patron; why should the Directorate answer to many when it can answer to one? But she is not the first Crying Woman to thrust her burning fingers into the heart of Guild power, and her ashes will probably join those of her predecessors.

Months ago, Vaadra of Gem's slaver caravan slew three scorpion demons in the Southern desert. As one demon lay dying, it sent its soul forth as a red scorpion that entered Vaadra's body that night as he slept. Over the following weeks it slowly devoured him from within. It should then have torn free of the merchant's husk, but it finds perverse pleasure in retaining his body and living his life. 'Vaadra' eats heavily and wears voluminous robes to conceal the bulges of demonic claws and tail. He spends recklessly, unconcerned with exhausting his fortune, for he feels alien eggs swell inside him.

THE TRADE WITH HELL

Some Guild factors deal with Hell directly. The dangers are far greater than bringing demons into Creation. So are the potential profits.

Slaves comprise the Guild's primary export to the Demon City. While mortal slaves serve many purposes in Hell, almost all end up as prayer sources, torture victims or victuals. So Hell-caravans carry the weak, the unskilled, the crippled and the aged, all worth more to demon buyers than to customers in Creation.

Guild caravans also bring other items—foodstuffs, alcohol, unworked lumber and stone, and assorted finished goods. In mad Malfeas, one never knows whether goods as ordinary as palm wine, copper cookware or paper cranes will pique a demon's interest. More importantly, Strangers—that handful of Exalts, God-Bloods and other Creation natives living in Hell—will pay exorbitant prices for the comforts of home.

Hell's exports are more exotic. While Malfeas' metals aren't identical to those of Creation, they are plentiful, so caravans return laden with greasy Malfean silver and tarnished Malfean gold. Other treasures include drugs, poisons, infernal dream-liquors, demonhair textiles, demonskin leather, caged hell-beasts, books from Orabilis's libraries and more.

The trade with Hell is one of the Reclamation's greatest assets. Because of it, warlocks laden with infernal relics aren't automatically recognized for what they are, as rich mortals have procured such things from the Guild for centuries.

PATHS AND KEYS

The Guild has many ways to access the Demon City. None of them are safe.

Theoretically, one may simply set off into a place of desolation and eventually wander into the Endless Desert. But the Guild disdains such an undependable method, for its savants know seven of the sixteen secret paths from Creation into Cecelyne. Guild fortresses stand near those paths with fixed locales. These are laden with provisions for Hell-bound caravans and garrisoned with hundreds of troops, including supernatural aid, both to screen out rival merchants and to thwart demonic incursions from the Endless Desert. Oldest of these keeps is the Rooksbeak. This black granite fortress stands athwart a mountain pass in the Scavenger Lands connecting forever-vernal Mokuren with the Thaumataarchy of Tessen-O—except when the stars are right and certain sacrifices are made.

The Guild also possesses several Keys to the Infernal Gates (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Infernals**, pp. 190-191). Such keys vary in efficacy. For instance, the key owned by the Cheraki merchant prince Delkas Vair may only be used once in any given mortal city. This is logistically inconvenient for Vair, who has exhausted its use in every hub city within a thousand miles of Cherak. He must choose between relocating to a new base of operations or selling the key to another merchant prince.

No matter the route into Malfeas, returning requires five days of travel through Cecelyne. This can be more dangerous than the inbound journey. The Endless Desert is jealous and cruel, and she rarely allows mortals to leave the demon prison without sacrifice.

The safest means of interacting with the Demon City do not involve physical journeys. For instance, a merchant may visit Makarios' emporium through the medium of dreams. But even these methods may be dangerous. Merchants untrained in the occult are better off leaving such things to professionals.

THAT HELLBOUND STARE

Those who have followed the caravan routes to Hell and back are easy to spot. Physical signs mark those who have done so the longest. The drugs they take to withstand the Demon City's poisonous air leave them with joint pain, leaden teeth and nails, brittle graying hair and cataract-clouded eyes. Many bear awful scars that gleam a brassy hue from infernal cataplasms. But even those physically untouched bear psychic wounds, as Malfeas holds wonders and terrors that can break mortal minds. And as a patron's protection does not extend to those who leave the caravan of their own will, demons try to tempt Guildsmen into their clutches—but so alien are demons' psyches that their temptations can be more nightmarish than their threats.

Three years after his one visit to Hell, the guardsman Olgeir of Norvanka wakes each night in a cold sweat. He dreams of the lovely creature that lured him from the caravan; he dreams of the brass tower and the flame; he dreams of his flesh bloodlessly cut apart, unraveled into ribbons, and the exquisite pleasure of it. The thaumaturge Irenda White-Eyes





has taken Olgeir as a lover, and is pleased that her work holds no terror for him. Soon, he will ask her to call the demon forth from Hell.

INFERNAL PATRONS

Mortal merchants cannot simply enter the Demon City and treat with its inhabitants. No Infernal law prevents demons and hell-beasts from snatching them up before they reach Malfestas' brazen gates; neither mortal guardsmen nor thaumaturgical talismans offer any protection. To treat with Hell, a merchant prince must have a patron or ally.

Most Guild trade with Hell goes through the South. Two of the secret paths to Cecelyne lie amid the Southern sands, allowing Guild sandships to pass smoothly from Creation to the Endless Desert and visit the Demon City ports established by the Bleak Sand Argosy (see **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. V—Malfestas**, pp. 64-65). In exchange for exorbitant fees, the Argosy offers the services of its navigators, protection from its pirates, safe haven at its ports and brokerage services for Guild goods.

The Guild also has formed pacts with various Second Circle demons. A citizen of Hell, once called to Creation by sorcery or thaumaturgy, can escort a caravan into the Demon City in relative safety. Most useful here is Florivet, the Whim-of-the-Wind. His bone-timbered ship travels both land and sea, and he has been known to haul cargoes in exchange for a crate of fine liquor or for the attentions of an alluring courtesan.

Other greater demons have extended their protection to Guild caravans—usually by means of a token rather than attending in person—in exchange for favors. For instance, Sondok requires Guild caravans under her aegis to carry information and goods between her fiefdom in Hell and her cults in the South, while Berengiere demands passionate slaves from which to weave her cloth-of-voices. Mambres, the Alchemist of Conjunctions, calls for hundreds of samples of Creation's stones, metals, liquids and plants to fuel his experiments in transmutation. And Emerenzia takes only slaves—including a single Guildsman of his choice from each caravan.

The Guild's most potent ally in Hell is Amalion, the Manse of Echoes Ascending (see **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. V—Malfestas**, pp. 116-118). Five years ago, the factor Jasmine Mantle contacted Amalion through a Yozi cult in An-Teng. Guild geomancers spent four years raising a manse to Amalion's specifications on a potent demesne in the hills north of Thousand Dragons Lake. On Calibration, a doorway at the manse's heart opens onto a sand-floored corridor marked with the sooty remains of campfires, its terminus opening within one of Amalion's manse-bodies in the Demon City. This provides unparalleled access to Hell, but caravans must spend a full year there before the corridor reopens. Lingering in luxury inside Amalion's palatial form, Jasmine Mantle and her fellow caravaneers are now wholly under the demon's thrall.

THE SIDEREAL EXALTED AND THE GUILD

The Five-Score Fellowship is not responsible for the rise of the Guild; no prophecies foretold the rise of Brem Marst's empire of silver; no astrology ensured its ascension. But while the Sidereal Exalted may have had no hand in the creation of the Guild, they have been far from absent in its history. The Bureau of Destiny has spent centuries waging campaigns of intrigue and subtle manipulation with the Guild, seeking to guide its course from the shadows of Yu-Shan.

A WEB OF SILVER

Every department and faction in the Bureau of Destiny has its own designs on the Guild. Whether it is co-opting Guild silver to fund freedom fighters in An-Teng or spreading Faction propaganda through Guild caravanserais, countless agendas abound. But some goals transcend all factional scheming and partisan intrigue. First among these are the directives set by the Five Maidens. Each of the starry sisters has shown their own special interest in the Guild's affairs. Mercury answers Guild prayers for safe passage and profit, commanding the gods of road and sea to show favor to their ventures. Venus delights in the Guild's traffic of drugs and flesh, sometimes styling herself after the fashions of their indigo-clad prostitutes. Mars oversees the stratagems of Guild mercenaries with a general's approval. Jupiter shows stoic approval for their game of masks, making sure that certain trade secrets remain kept. Saturn alone shows no interest in the Guild, and her silence is mandate enough. The Five Divisions of the Bureau of Destiny have modeled their general policies on the Guild after the attitudes of the Maidens. Few Sidereals defy them openly.

Other universal goals are borne out of sheer necessity. The Bureau of Destiny uses the Guild's world-spanning trade networks to maintain Creation's stability in the face of chaos; only the most fanatically misguided Sidereal would risk this for the sake of ideological goals or partisan politics. Sidereals might be sent into the field to redirect Guild caravan trains to edge regions in risk of falling into the Wyld, or to build poor border communities into cities capable of attracting Guild trade. Strike teams are also sent out to remove obstacles and resolve disruptions that threaten trade routes vital to maintaining Creation. Whether it is a Lunar Anathema raiding slaver ships or the ill-timed breaking of a caravan's axles, anything that stops the flow of wealth is a threat to the Bureau's goals. Celestial gods that interfere in Guild dealings may find themselves victims of Sidereal intrigues—pity Sorayo, the abolitionist god, who has met with more audits than entire Bureau departments combined.

Sidereal intervention also occurs when the Guild's otherworldly dealings threaten Creation. The Bureau of Destiny cares not if a merchant price sells slaves to the fae, or bargains with ghosts and demons. These trivial offenses merit no response from Yu-Shan. The wrath of Heaven is

brought down only when Creation itself is placed at risk. When unwise slavers risk letting Creation's edges fall into the Wyld, when Guild sorcerers call up demons beyond their power to command, when merchant princes make themselves unwitting pawns of the Deathlords, only then are Sidereal strike teams sent out to secure the safety of the world. Viziers might be sent into the field to prevent an unwise caravan trip to the Wyld by poisoning a merchant prince's wife, or to end a factor's involvement in infernalism by making his hired sorcerers unable to remember his identity. Clean-up measures are also taken in the aftermath of these interventions; after the Fair Folk invasion of RY 547, Sidereal astrologers wove fate on a massive scale to ensure that the Guild Directorate's restrictions on Wyld trade would be heeded by the Guild at large. When the subtle approach is not enough, the Sidereal Exalted are not above assassination. Convention chairs may call in lethal strikes on ranking Guild members for violations that fall under their bureaucratic jurisdiction. The Convention on Essence Wielders deals with infernalism in the Guild; the Convention on Deathlords monitors their Underworld dealings; the four Directional Conventions oversee Wyld commerce within their respective regions. While the authority to approve assassination is formally held by the elders who head these Conventions, Sidereal field agents who deem lethal measures necessary are rarely censured for their actions.

THE BEST-LAID SCHEMES

If the Chosen of the Maidens had their druthers, the Guild would be little more than a game piece placed upon their board, an unwilling and obedient pawn of the Viziers. Unfortunately for them, this is not the case. While the Guild offers unique rewards to the Five-Score Fellowship, it also poses unique obstacles. Of these, the greatest is its sheer size and scale. Innumerable thousands of traders, mercenaries, and craftsmen carry out the Guild's operations in every corner of Creation. The Sidereal Exalted are but one hundred in number. Out of those hundred, no more than a scarce few can be assigned to the Guild. Even a single Sidereal represents a major investment of resources for the Bureau of Destiny, and manpower is the one resource it has always wanted for. At most, the Bureau might have five Sidereals working on the Guild at any given time. Seizing control of a global organization numbering nearly a million mortals with only five people—even five Celestial Exalted—would be a legendary undertaking. The Guild's vast size also serves as a shield against Sidereal astrology. Weaving the destiny of a single merchant prince or caravanserai is simple even for a novice Vizier, but manipulating the fate of the entire Guild demands a master of astrology. Even then, crafting such a destiny would require complicated preparations, and entail a substantial risk of Paradox. As such, Guild-spanning destinies are woven only rarely, and almost never last for long.

But the Bureau's problems with the Guild lie in more than its size. Although its name implies a singular entity, the

truth of the Guild is more complicated. Rather than a unified hierarchical structure, the Guild is divided into countless independent and autonomous organizations. While the Guild Directorate nominally lead the organization, it does so through policy, not direct operational control. Beyond this, every factor is a law unto themselves. This divided structure steeply limits the extent to which the Sidereals can control the Guild as a whole. Subverting a merchant prince or factor offers little to no influence outside their individual operations; even a hierarch's power is nebulous at best. With no chain of command to target, the Five-Score Fellowship must work at co-opting every individual cell of the Guild if they are to seize the whole—an approach not favored neither by their magic or their manpower. When the identity of a powerful figure in the Guild is compromised, they become a lodestone for Sidereal attention. The clash and conflict of disparate destinies over a single individual makes it frustratingly difficult for any one Exalt to successfully advance his agenda. Sometimes, this whirlwind of fate makes even more problems for the Bureau than it solves. When the factor Quincampoix's identity was discovered by a Division of Secrets spy, the war of astrology waged over him escalated to near-catastrophic levels. The factor found himself hounded by bizarre reversals of causality and suspensions of natural law. One day, his morning cup of chai tea would erupt into a full-grown spice tree; the next, he was crowned king of all the cats of Nexus. Not until the Bureau of Endings threatened high-level sanctions for all Sidereals involved did this disastrous breakdown of reality end.

The Guild's commerce with raksha, ghosts, and demons poses another obstacle for the Sidereal Exalted. Many of their most powerful prophetic Charms are impotent in the face of beings outside of fate, leaving an unfortunate blind spot in even their best intelligencing operations. A routine mission might be unexpectedly turned into a life-or-death battle by the intervention of raksha nobles, powerful ghosts, or mighty demons. The Sidereals are painfully aware of this flaw in their foresight, and take great pains to plan for such eventualities. Nevertheless, even their best-made plans cannot account for every unforeseen possibility. So far, they have been saved by the relative weakness of the spirits and fae that the Guild deals with. A field team of Sidereal agents can usually handle the unexpected arrival of a raksha noble or a Second Circle demon. If the Guild were to deal with more powerful beings that escape the Loom of Fate's reach—Unshaped Raksha, Deathlords, or Green Sun Princes—then there will be dark days ahead for the Chosen of the Maidens.

Not all of the Sidereals' difficulties lie with the Guild, however. Celestial politics can cause just as many problems as any factor or merchant prince. While division policy and pragmatic necessity may unify the Five-Score Fellowship on the matter of the Guild, politically-charged missions may still encounter opposition or interference from other Sidereals. A Bronze Faction agent sent to defuse a stand-off between Guild mercenaries and the Realm's military might find that a nearby Solar has been forewarned of his arrival; a





Gold Faction team trying to win a merchant prince over to the Cult of the Illuminated might find their project budget slashed to nothing. The Guild's silver coinage is less potent in strengthening Creation than jade currency would be, but any mission to promote a change to the Realm's jade standard meets with ferocious opposition from the staunchly anti-Imperial Gold Faction. The Bronze Faction seeks to force the Guild into collusion with the Immaculate Order to spread their dogma, and so covertly incites violent opposition to the Guild among small gods, forcing Guildsmen to turn to Immaculate monks capable of putting down defiant spirits. Worse still are the gods. Numerous celestial deities profit from the worship and enterprise of the Guild, and guard their interests with vindictive jealousy. Any mission that risks even the slightest possibility of harm to a Beast of Resplendent Liquid requires prior clearance weeks in advance from Golden Reverie, while Blue Crest Merchant threatens a century's worth of paperwork for any Sidereal who curses Guild ships in the West. Navigating the labyrinth of bribes, favors, and double-dealing needed to avoid such divine displeasure is many times just as difficult as the fieldwork itself.

WHAT KINGS WILL COME

Chejop Kejak would like to take credit for the Guild, but he knows he cannot. The truth about the Guild is simply this: sometimes mortals create something which is good, strong, and lasting; something which assumes a greater destiny for itself without waiting for it to be supplied by the mercurial whims of Heaven. This, he supposes, is what drew the Unconquered Sun to humanity when he made them his champions.

LUNARS AND THE GUILD

The Guild has bought, ridden, and spread itself into regions one could no longer consider part of Creation. It has slipped into recesses of chaos, drifted so far from the world that it found itself on the silver sands of Hell, slept in light and awoken in the shadowed lands of death. And of all the beings it has encountered, the Lunar Exalted perplex it the most.

The Lunars carry on as remnants of a fallen era. They are a living history, chained to a world they despise, and yet one they must save if any semblance of their memory is to continue on with any kind of meaning. For the Lunar Exalted, existence is a matter of extremes. They could allow the world to be swallowed by the Wyld, and then they would have nothing left on which to write their tale of sorrow, and no one left to hear it. While some would find comfort in such an end, the Lunars rage against it. After all, Luna chose them to be the ultimate survivors.

So, as they strike out against a world whose destiny they have deemed illegitimate and false—as they flense the world of progress and fight to drive it back into the darkness of the Fallen Age—they also fight to protect Creation and her peoples. They are there to punish, but also to preserve. The world cannot know what it has lost until it becomes aware of that loss. To do that, it must survive.

Over the millennia, the Lunars have defied the gods. They have driven back the Fair Folk time and again. When stranger and much worse things reared up within the Wyld, turning savage eyes toward Creation, the Lunars plucked them out and sent those horrors fleeing blindly into the Faraway. In time, the Lunars have tricked the Yozis back into their prisons, and they have stood guard over the world. But so have they stymied the designs of the Sidereal Exalted, trimming back the empires of the Dragon-Blooded through war and sabotage. The Lunars have not forgotten who stole the world from them.

Of all these, it is the Guild the Lunars find it most difficult to deal with.

One might question why those who bare their fangs at Heaven would stop to consider the Guild. But the Guild is no small concern to the Lunar Exalted. As they carry out their war of attrition with the Scarlet Empire, as they hold the gates of the Wyld shut and they do deadly battle with the agents of the Bureau of Destiny, it is the Guild which they have formed no complete response to.

The Lunars have seen the Guild from all sides. They watched its incipient growth and saw it blossom outward, in time, to become more than just a conglomerate of businesses that can be destroyed. They saw the Guild as the birth of an idea which could not be erased, and many Lunars questioned the rightness of doing so. The Guild, while in many ways parasitic, was also the first and strongest survival-response the Lunars had seen to the falling of the world and the tyranny of the Dragon-Blooded. It was mortal men and women banding together to create a network of money and a legacy of creating and meeting demand that could touch every life and every inch of Creation. Through wealth, these mortals could step up to the gods and even the Exalted. Here were people who were not made to march in the lines Heaven had drawn for them.

Yet it was no more right that the Guild rule Creation than the illegitimate Dragon-Blooded. So the Lunar attitude toward the Guild became this: Let the Guild stand. The little kings are as illegitimate as the big ones, but it is the latter who are the greatest danger to the world. The Lunars support the Guild where it suits their agenda, and they seek to crush it where it does not. Specifically, in regions where the Guild historically acted as a buffer to economic expansion (and certain domination) by the Scarlet Empire, the Lunars allowed the Guild to operate unobstructed. Where the Guild grew too powerful, or has pushed too far into regions the Lunars have preserved as ancient, unsettled and therefore sacred, Luna's Chosen have

been instrumental in the collapse of entire branches of the Guild.

The Lunars are well aware of the Guild's trade in slavery and its barter with the raksha, and have made no move to stop it. They see the misery the Guild has created as a necessary result of the Fallen Age, and are using the Guild's support of Creation by commerce—and the sacrifice of humanity that entails—as evidence of the failure of the Sidereals and the gods. It is only where the newly-returning Solars are concerned that the Lunars have begun to react outside this general character of apathetic reprimand. They are terrified of the idea that the Guild may incorporate and corrupt the Solars, and have been taking steps to ruin all transactions between them. Lunars have reacted variously: where a Solar was hired as a bodyguard to a Guildsman, a Lunar replaced the merchant's heart with a rock while the Solar grappled with the Lunar's cast-off self. Where a Solar baker was hired to supply cakes for the Summer of Weddings in Ashur, which a Guildsman was catering, a Lunar ate all 54 cakes in a misguided attempt to keep the Solar pure.

More recently, the Southeastern Tea and Mercantile Company, a Guild trading interest, began the complete massacre of indigenous peoples in the Blackwater region of the Maruto River. The people cried out in pain and misery to their ancestors, whose ghosts in turn called out to the wind, the trees and the wild, crying for the end of their tribe, and praying for a champion who would stand against the monsters who had come to their land. Their prayer was answered by a Lunar called Ghost Wolf, who drove back the agents and the soldiers of Southeastern Tea and Mercantile, breaking their dams, flooding their camps and dragging their men down into the murky waters of the swamps to be eaten by things which dwell in the dark. Empowered by the prayers of the river tribes, Ghost Wolf was able to transform himself into a variety of horrific guardian totems in order to terrorize the Guild.

Eventually, the Guild, citing the power of the ghosts and their champion, enlisted the aid of one of the Liminal Exalted. As the two champions did battle under the darkness of a moonless sky, neither could gain the advantage. But the Liminal soon realized that it was the Guild that had brought death to the region, and it was only by the Guild's defeat that the ghosts would return to the lands of the dead. Showing no signs of flagging, the Chernozem withdrew from battle and returned to the Underworld to face the judgment of his dark mother.

THE GUILD AND THE UNDERWORLD

The Guild has always feared the dead.

It bullies gods and employs the Chosen. It shakes hands with the Fair Folk and keeps running tabs in the alehouses of Hell. But when shadows weep against the





windowpane; when the room stays cold no matter how high the fire is built; when chains clank up the stairs to a factor's loft one by one, slow and heavy and inevitable—in these moments even the wealthiest merchant prince cannot forget that he is mortal. In the depths of the Guild's calculating heart, it knows that death is the final sum and the Underworld the place where all bills come due.

HE WHO DIES WITH THE MOST

The Guild's qat and opium plantations kill thousands each year—starved, beaten, overdosed or worked to death. Its rapacious economic warfare ruins entire cultures, displaces indigenous communities, starves families, binds individuals in chains of iron or addiction. The Guild is widely despised by those it has broken under its tread—and those vengeful masses await the arrival of Guildsmen in the Underworld.

The Guild's official funerary policies are simple and utilitarian. Upon his demise, a Guildsman is guaranteed burial or burning according to local custom—nothing more. The Guild needs no hungry ghosts plaguing its caravanserais, and the trade routes are perilous enough without haunted corpses rotting along the roadside. With the body disposed of, an estate tax imposed upon death is part and parcel to Guild membership: 30% of a merchant prince's holdings pass into the hands of the Guild, to redistribute or reinvest as it sees fit; the rest pays existing debts and agreements, and whatever is left passes on according to his will.

Guildsmen live in terror of such a pauper's demise—they know what awaits them in the lands below. And so a canny merchant prince maintains a will with up-to-date funerary arrangements, and cultivates agents he trusts to carry out those plans (the Guild is full of horror stories of inheritance-hungry families or solicitors who shirked on funeral costs). A successful and well-prepared factor will be interred in a tomb bedecked with lavish grave goods—meat and bread and wine, strong armor and well-sharpened weapons—as well as carved soldiers who will become mighty effigies to defend him in the lands below. Horses and camels are often slaughtered at such funerals, their blood poured into urns and interred with the deceased merchant, to carry the Guildsman and his wares through the shadowed lands.

The wealthiest and most ruthless Guildsmen don't die alone; their wills pay out extravagant sums to their solicitors, family, and friends within the organization to see to the final disposition of their slaves—favorite bodyguards, secretaries, concubines and butlers have all been entombed or incinerated (some already slain, some still screaming) with their departed masters during Guild funerals. The Guild keeps such funeral sacrifices as quiet as it is able, for word of such a burial risks terrified slave revolts throughout the region. To die in chains is one thing; to wear them forever in the Underworld is a thought no one can bear.

Of course, only successful merchants can afford such funerary luxury—the fate of the unlucky and unsuccessful is an unmarked grave and defenseless descent into the arms of

the vengeful dead. That this gives all Guildsmen a looming incentive to break open new markets, increase profit margins, and fill the coffers of the Guild does not escape the Directorate.

GRAVE COMMERCE

Most successful merchant princes will say dealing with the dead invites only sorrow. Ghosts are at best inscrutable and greedy, at worst murderous. Many of the treasures of the dead cannot survive long in the world of the living. And yet, where there is some margin for profit, there will always be up-and-coming Guildsmen seeking to make their fortune.

Most of the Guild's deathly commerce occurs in shadowlands. The living of such regions make easy clients for bulk trade; at the simplest level, foreign meat and produce untouched by the odd malaise of the Underworld is always in demand, as are medicines, bright dyes and warm-hued wood. In terms of export, the markets of Nexus, Great Forks, Paragon and the Lap are always eager for jewelry, furniture, and clothing bearing the distinctive mark of the Underworld's touch—spiderweb-woven dresses, necklaces of blood sapphires, wardrobes of mist-pale wood.

Other Guildsmen look at the shadowlands and hatch greater or more specialized ambitions. The small city of Tern's Wake, 300 miles east of Cherak, is a natural port far too valuable to abandon for any reason—despite falling into the arms of the Underworld shortly after the Great Contagion. For over ninety years the Guild has operated the House of Joyful Tears at the edge of an upscale district several blocks from the city's waterfront: an expensive brothel which facilitates congress between ghosts and the living. But the House of Joyful Tears does not simply reap a profit from the dark passions of the living and the dead; in addition to his regular stable of high-priced courtesans, the House's current operator, Balarab Uronno, regularly cycles foreign debtor-widows in and out of the brothel, using them to breed Ghost-Blooded children. Those Bone Children who display uncommon beauty are trained as expensive courtesans themselves and shipped off to foreign Guild-run brothels or sold to wealthy princes, to service those with a taste for the exotic. Half-Dead of martial inclination are trained as exorcists and set to guard Guild caravans which routinely pass through shadowlands or other death-haunted regions, particularly in the North. Ghost-Blooded who are able to awaken their Essence are rarest and most valuable of all; the Guild sponsors such prodigies in the study of necromancy.

Beyond the shadowlands, the Underworld is a landscape as rich and ripe for exploitation as the strange boroughs of Hell or the gossamer-forged halls of faerie. There are those in Nexus, in Cherak, in Chiaroscuro, who will pay great sums for the bone-pale wood of the trees that grow along the banks of the Acheron, or the luminous but subdued amber lining the bed of the Eridanus. There are disturbed sculptors who dream fervently of working with the nightmare ores of the Labyrinth. On moonless winter nights, it is fashionable among certain young coterie of Dragon-Blooded to illuminate their

gardens with pyre-flame torches, make love by the light of the dead, and cast auguries predicting their own glorious demise.

And yet the Guild rolls no caravans along the roads of the Underworld, sends no well-armed expeditions to mine nightmares from the Labyrinth, and only rarely meets with ghost-princes in their halls of memoriam and weeping stone. Mastery of trade in the Underworld belongs to a force older and crueller than the Guild.

THE MONEY WHEEL

Normally when wood and paper effigies are burned in honor of the already-buried, they appear in the Underworld as Essence tokens. There exists a certain thaumaturgical procedure known to adepts of the Art of the Dead (*Wicker-Spun Cornucopia*—2, Intelligence, 2, One hour) which allows such burnt offerings to manifest as grave goods instead—idealized versions of themselves. A paper shirt becomes the finest clothing, a tiny balsa wood ship creates a kingly barge to ply the rivers of the dead. Alas, grave goods quickly rot and fade away when exposed to the light of Creation's sun.

Armonium Bliss, a Tengese factor, has reasoned that a spell to protect grave goods from the light of the sun should be possible, and has begun investing her fortune into research to discover the secret of such a mystical working. Were she to uncover a means of quickly transforming bits of wood and paper into luxury goods capable of being moved into Creation, her fortune would be assured—a bid at joining the Directorate wouldn't be out of the question.

Then again, Bliss has been less than discriminating in which necromancers and thaumaturges she hires. Some see no reason why success should profit the factor rather than themselves; others envision a hold on a rising star of the Guild, leading to wider influence over the organization.

Agents of the Deathlords, of course, imagine other uses for such magic...

THE TIMELESS ORDER OF MANACLE AND COIN

Iron wheels rattle across the bone-paved highway. Sullen and noble, coal-black memory-horses carry scouts ahead of the clanking swarm. The slow drumming of the dead sets pace for the massive, bone-and-shadow bulk of the ghost yeddim. Behind them come the clanking thralls in their soulsteel coffles; and the wood-and-steel carts piled high with gleaming, wondrous treasures: swords sharp as hate and cold as ice; baskets which never empty of cheese and pomegranates; precious memory-glass, raw emotion pressed

between its plates, waiting for the highest bidder. Jade effigies march alongside, the constant stony grating of their tread a counterpoint to the quiet shuffling and low moans of the ghostly thralls who make up the bulk of the caravan's product.

The grim procession stretches back and back, until the eye loses sense of it.

This is the Timeless Order of Manacle and Coin: the ancient trade compact of the Underworld, loved by none but dealt with by many, for such are the ways of the dead.

A BLEAK AMBITION

The Timeless Order's origins stretch back to the First Age, and the demise of a mighty lord of the Eclipse Caste: Urun Kugsith Lugal, whose armies and alliances orchestrated the demise of the Chorus of Sighs during the Primordial War.

Lugal died in the mid-second millennium of the First Age, master of enormous estates throughout the South, long estranged from his fellows in the Solar Deliberative. His funeral was one of the greatest organized to that point in the First Age: Mourners were imported from the five Directions; demon princes were called forth from Hell to recite the humiliations and defeats they and their masters had suffered at Lugal's hands; captured Unshaped were forged into eternally burning torches to light his tomb. Potent treasures and vast wealth were interred with the Primordial War veteran.

Most notably and controversially, the last of the Uddshua were sealed behind great slabs of marble in the deepest level of the Eclipse's tomb, that their spirits might serve him forever.

Having arrived in the Underworld a potentate of vast power, possessed of mighty, unearthly slaves, Lugal set about binding other ghosts to his service. The markets of the Underworld, he discovered, were not like those of Creation; opulence is the norm, sought after by only the crudest of paupers. The true commodities of the dead are etched in blood and prayer. The great trade of the Underworld is in souls.

Lugal's compact began as a sacrifice conspiracy, in which skilled mortals were slain in funerary rituals to become thralls for the Eclipse to bring to market. He was abetted in this scheme by Siuna Qan, his still-living Sidereal wife. Protected from the eyes of Heaven and the Deliberative, this illegal slaving network spread out to the East and beyond.

Siuna died during the Calibration Banquet; though her husband eagerly awaited her arrival, her spirit never tarried in the Underworld. But the death of the nascent Order's greatest ally also marked the passing of its greatest threat; the Dragon-Blooded gave no thought to affairs of the dead. Shadowlands split the skin of Creation in the wake of their incessant wars, and in these places the Timeless Order helped spread the ancestor cult and the practice of burying the dead with servants and grave goods. Those wealthy dead too savvy to be tricked out of their funerary treasures were recruited into the Order, and in this manner it flourished.

THE KING IN HIS COUNTING HOUSE

Tonight few ghosts know the name of Urun Kugsith Lugal, but most know the Sovereign of Chains, founder





and master of the Timeless Order. When he appears in public, Lugal wears a toothsome death-mask of purest, unalloyed jade. He covers his form in a glorious, rippling robe woven of the corpses of those who have betrayed the Timeless Order; their tears drip now and again from its hem and sleeves. His waist and shoulders are girded in gilded manacles and chains. In this fashion he has taken for his identity the three pillars of power as he understands them: wealth, retribution, and enslavement.

Lugal's tomb was long ago swallowed by the sands of the great Southern desert; the Timeless Order's base of operations, a powerful manse known as the Counting House, is situated in the Underworld nearby. A single well-guarded track leads to it, cutting across shifting dunes of bone-dust and ash; in all other directions, the desert is haunted by ravenous shades. The manse's stepped-pyramid exterior is completely covered over in dead currency: golden tokens, crimson seeds, crafted flint, letters of note and account, and the brass coins devas once gambled for all gleam in the dead light of the Underworld's false sun.

The opulent upper levels of the Counting House are a reflection of Lugal's hazy memories of Heaven, where beautifully moliated slaves service the every whim and desire of visiting anacreons and honored guests. Bitter wine flows from bottomless jugs, while white apples overflow from endless baskets, and bound angyalkae play the harp Time.

The work of the Timeless Order is done on the manse's middle floors: ledgers are kept by an army of well-educated thralls, while junior probates of the Order attend to transfers of Essence between crystalline repositories through use of appropriate Arcanoi. These young ghosts try not to think of the terrible anacreons reveling above, or the alien spirits haunting the halls below.

The Order's records and bills of account are kept in the lowest levels of the Counting House, along with its great central treasury. These are attended solely by the Uddshua and the Sovereign of Chains himself.

WHEEL-TRACKS CUT IN DUST

The Timeless Order is strongest in the Underworld's South, where it takes ruthless advantage of the cold realities of death: ghosts are untiring and the misery of the Southern deserts brings them torment, but not destruction. Where living merchants require camels, water, and cunningly-designed barges, the Timeless Order needs only chains and whips. Thralls double as product and beasts of burden, carrying heavy bundles of luxury grave goods upon their backs as they are marched to market across the endless dunes. The haughty ghosts of Gem eagerly trade their servants for dead Varangian horologists; Delzahn ghosts guard the Order's caravans in exchange for foreign wives; the quarrelsome dead of Harborhead have no thralls to trade, as all live sacrifices are dedicated to Ahlat: instead they trade jade from deep, Labyrinthine mines within their territories for effigies with which to wage their endless wars.

CHILDREN OF THE QUERY

The Uddshua rose from the slopes of the Mountain and the Beast Upon It long before the birth of humanity or the Unconquered Sun. Insular, strange and sorcerous by inclination, they were never a populous race, and suffered mass purges during the War. A scarce handful survived into the First Age, enslaved by Urun Kugsith Lugal as victory trophies. These too finally passed into extinction during the Eclipse lord's funeral, ritually sacrificed that their spirits might be bound into his service for all eternity.

The ghostly Uddshua stand nine feet tall, painfully thin, gray-skinned with flesh like dry, unfinished clay. Their hands are eight-fingered and seven-jointed, jerky, swift, spiderlike and painfully precise; their faces great empty holes in which cilia sometimes flutter. They hide these unsightly bodies beneath dark robes on those occasions when they emerge from the bowels of the Counting House. The Children of the Query are accomplished necromancers, bending their arts to the whim of the Sovereign of Chains, to whose will they are bound utterly. Enslaving human ghosts through their arts is the only pleasure the alien spirits now find in their endless existence.

In the bleak woods and barren hills of the East, the Order's caravans roll through a nightmare mesh of conflicting principalities, cyclical monarchies, petty tyrants and militant necropoli. All are potential clients in the eyes of the Order, which knows that all ghosts of power in the East have enemies. Any impediment to a caravan's movement or trade is met with steep discounts in effigies, weapons, and mercenaries offered to the belligerent's neighbors. Other trade organizations also flourish in the East, particularly around old Hollow, Great Forks, and Sijan. The Order poaches the best ghosts from such federations, then buys up bulk goods and skilled thralls from local vendors and moves them in distant markets. Few ghosts can afford to travel far and wide across the East as the Order can.

Spirit mammoths are rare in the North, jealously guarded by the Icewalker dead, and so many caravans use chained teams of moliated or Wyld-twisted ghosts to drag the Order's great bone sledges across the ice and snow. The memories of fine seal furs, stout ale, and sturdy whaling boats are piled and lashed atop these sledges, along with ivory cages packed with yet more thralls. Few Northern thralls are marched in chains. A ghost may no more be slain by cold than by heat, but prolonged trudging through the death-cold snow of the North and exposure to its screaming winds tends to turn the extremities of the dead black, and to lend them an aspect of hollow eyes and hungry teeth; and so the Timeless Order



protects its thralls on the way to market, lest they depreciate in value. It sells concubines to the Icewalkers, catamites to the dead of Cherak, sullen-eyed Icewalker trackers to the Haslanti, and nothing at all in the vicinity of Gethamane. The Order raids the fields around Whitewall frequently; that great city does little to honor its dead and often turns them out as paupers, presenting easy pickings for slavers. The comeliest among these ghosts it sells to the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears in exchange for necromantic prodigies; it also supplies weapons and arms to those supporters of the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible who seek to destroy Whitewall, for the Timeless Order's trade is much restricted by the great road that runs out from that city, cutting the North in half and forcing its sledges to swing wide around it.

The West is a place of salt and savagery, where chained lines of thralls row the barques that carry them to the hungry markets of Coral, Driftwood Bay, Sharktooth, and other havens of the warring dead. Individual salvagers of the Order ply the endless waters on ensorceled rafts of reed and papyrus, pyre-flame lanterns leading them to lost souls adrift on the wine-dark sea. Thralls are not only the primary wealth of the Western Underworld, they also buy the Order protection from the mighty and terrible Lintha dead. Through dark inquiries and unspeakable bargains the Order has learned how to vivisect chained thralls and spill their memories into the sea, attracting vast, dead, nameless things from the lightless depths—things ancient and rotten when Creation was yet newly made. Not even the Lintha will cross their path in pursuit of a fleeing Order vessel.

The Order believes Stygia to be the place fools go to declare themselves mighty. To hold the great city at the center of the world, the Sovereign has observed, is an illusion of strength; to wield the capacity to starve that city of its luxuries, prayers, and servants—that is true strength. The Timeless Order sends groups of promising young slave-catchers to the Isle's hinterlands to learn their trade. They hunt the impoverished dead of the Realm through the hills and mountains of the Isle, securing them in chains under the watchful eyes of a senior invigilator, and thence send them back to sponsors in the Threshold, or else sell them directly to the great city at the center of the Underworld. The Timeless Order holds no properties in the city of Stygia, instead counting itself welcome in every household worthy of note—the indolent dead of the great city are too addicted to their indulgences to dare withhold any hospitality.

THE ANACREONS

Unlike the Guild, the Timeless Order has a single ruler—the Sovereign of Chains. The Sovereign, in turn, has raised up the most successful and ambitious ghosts of the Order as lieutenants. These anacreons carry out the Order's business in distant locales, oversee specific fields of trade, and carry out the Sovereign's will when bid to do so. Each is powerful, ruthless, and twisted by centuries of slave-prayer and sacrifice. A few are detailed below:

The White Widow oversees commerce with the Fair Folk in those rare places where the Wyld and Underworld touch, offering the burning passions of the recently deceased in exchange for transformative Wyld blessings. Thralls altered by such miracles, she has found, command high prices at the markets of the dead. From a distance she appears as an old woman wound up in mourning clothes; upon closer inspection her mouth, throat and eye sockets are full of blowing cobwebs; indeed, her body is an empty husk of webs and small black spiders. It is her habit, on those occasions when she does business with the Guild, to demand a mortal husband to take back with her to the Underworld. They never last to see Calibration. Her servants whisper that the Fair Folk hollowed out her soul in life, and that she hunts the broad expanse of the Underworld for that which might fill it up again.

The Carnelian Factor is most often encountered as an empty, blood-red dress made of meat and muscle, stitched with sinew and her own beautiful golden hair. She arranges bulk sales of thralls to the soulforges of several Deathlords, most notably the First and Forsaken Lion. Much of her time is occupied hunting other suppliers to the Deathlords and devouring or destroying them; the Carnelian Factor strives to make herself and her proxies the primary supply source for her clients. The Sovereign of Chains is under no illusions about the nature of the Deathlords, or that he and his fortunes will be spared from the wrath of the Neverborn should their servants triumph. It pleases him, then, to be able to starve the supply lines of the self-styled kings of the Underworld when the need arises. In the meantime, their payments fill his coffers.

Lord Ularabu is a corpulent mass carried about by 20 terrified thralls on a great cushioned palanquin, his vast maw containing 188 jeweled teeth, his doughy arms ending in slender, nimble, genius hands. Ularabu boasts himself more skilled in the arts of moliation than any other among the dead, and long ago gained the expensive vice of moliating thralls into living delicacies, which he then consumes. This is the fate that awaits palanquin-bearers who displease him; when at the Counting House, it is Lord Ularabu's habit to offer treats crafted by his art to those he does business with.

The Strix, a great avian shadow with burning white eyes, is aware that some Guildsmen love their families, and some are passionate about their politics, and some are fervent in their hobbies—but almost *all* Guildsmen love their money. The fortune of a deceased factor or merchant prince, then, often acts as a fetter for the ghost of the departed, and the Strix makes it his business to capture and enslave such souls. Tragedy, terror and death follow such haunted money as it passes into the coffers of widows, promising apprentices, and the Guild itself. Guildsmen learn to fear the owl's shadow on the treasury wall, or the rustle of dry wings as they count their money in the dead of night. Those reaped through such efforts, of course, pass into the Underworld still attached to the fortune they themselves left behind; in this fashion





does the Strix's banquet of grief and opportunity constantly replenish itself.

WHERE SUN AND SHADOW MEET

The Underworld is a place of memoriam, of echoes, of reflections. What the living reap in life, they sow among the dead; and the work of the dead itself marks ghosts in time. As such, the Timeless Order of Manacle and Coin looks upon the Guild as something almost akin to a communal fetter; Guildsmen view the Order as an ancient terror that has taken the scent of their collective blood, and found it sweet. They do their best to ignore their own role in having roused the beast, and in keeping it strong and hungry.

The Guild's rise to prominence in the time after the Great Contagion galvanized the Timeless Order, shocked it from moribund centuries of feasting upon the stale prayers of the departed and collecting the forgotten coins of the dead. What the living do resounds in the Underworld, and the Guild's rise was loud in the Order's ears, bringing its attention back to Creation, back to the light, back to the world of meat and breath.

The anacreons of the Order, having spent long and opulent centuries feasting on a banquet of avarice, recognize the Guild for what it is—they see themselves in it. They know that what the Guild may touch, it will grasp; and what it grasps, it will control. And so the Order stymies the Guild's efforts to deal with the dead as they deal with demons, the raksha, and the little gods—even as it traces the movements of the living Guild and eagerly awaits the arrival of its dead; even as it interjects itself as a go-between, brokering commerce between the Guild and the Underworld where it is able, squeezing blood and tears from such transactions. The Guild is the Order's client, its fixation, its prey.

The Guild, in the eyes of the anacreons, *belongs* to the Timeless Order; and the Order now orients many of its operations around those of the Guild, building Underworld trade hubs near the site of Guild slave plantations, manacles ready and waiting for the ghosts of recently-dead slaves—and their overseers. Guildsmen are mortal, mortals die, and when Guildsmen die, they join the Timeless Order—either wielding chains, or wearing them. Though of separate origins, the Order is now a reflection of the Guild—terrible, rapacious, and conjoined at the point where life ceases and obsession begins.

THE CULT OF BREM MARST

Dead Guildsmen are among the Underworld's most valuable commodities; few mortals can claim to be hated so deeply by so many, and a merchant prince in chains always fetches a high price on the basalt cobbleblocks of Hollow, or provokes a bidding war between clans of Haslanti dead.

Yet Brem Marst himself is the youngest ghost among the ranks of the Sovereign's inner council, and the only anacreon who still appears much as he did in life—though his eyes are silver coins, and the sleeves of his fine robes stained black with a mix of ink and blood. The other anacreons distrust Marst

and impede and oppose him by means subtle and overt, for they fear he intends to fill the Order with dead factors and merchant princes, and make it an arm of the Guild.

They're not wholly wrong. Brem Marst was good at playing the long game in life, and death has only sharpened his aptitudes—he sees in the Guild a base of supporters and personal power. Marst and his servants seek out dead Guildsmen just as the rest of the Order does. And, like the rest of the Order, when he finds a Guildsman who enters the afterlife as a pauper, he claps that fellow in chains and marches him to market—Marst has no need of a faction weighted down with the unsuccessful and unlucky. But those who bring a measure of their wealth with them to the lands below, who arrive able to defend themselves from specters, ghostly brigands, and would-be slavers—these men and women Brem Marst courts for membership in the Timeless Order.

He builds his faction slowly but surely, fending off the aggressions of his fellow anacreons with bribes, blackmail, and the haphazard support of the living Guild. The Directorate is aware of Marst's continued existence in the Underworld—although they no longer consider him a member of the organization he created. The Guild does not trust the dead, and Marst is no exception. Still, neither are they foolish enough to throw away a potential ally within enemy ranks, and so they tacitly support Marst's ambitions. To lesser Guildsmen, Brem Marst is a rumor, a legend, and a tale both inspirational and cautionary. Stories circulate of his wealth and power, but never of his happiness.

Members of Marst's faction favor the Guild when trading in the commodities of the dead, rather than seeking to bleed it for every last dinar and drop of sacrificial blood; in return, by order of the Directorate, the Guild continues to honor Marst with regular worship and sacrifice. In the sweltering summer heat of the coastal South, slaves sing out prayers to the Guild's founder as they harvest sugarcane under the overseer's whip. On the Western plantation-isle of Obsivu, natives who assault members of the Guild are sealed within a hollow bronze effigy of Marst and cooked alive. Elderly factors who feel the end drawing near make grand sacrifices to the Cult of Brem Marst, hoping to draw his eye to their worldly success.

Year by year, soul by soul, link by link, Marst grows his faction and strengthens the chains of power and ambition binding him to the Order, and the Order to the Guild. And so Marst is forced to prey upon his greatest creation to feed something much larger and much, much worse.

DEATHLY DEALINGS

The Timeless Order represents a reckoning for many Guildsmen—their appetites and ambitions, their avarice and cruelty come back to haunt them in the most literal sense. Visions of the waiting ranks of the dead, eyes hollow, chains clanking, trouble the sleep of many a successful merchant prince—and not all such phantoms are the products of a

THE YOUNGEST ANACREON

Given the Order's malice toward the Guild—a dark appetite forged link by link, ingot by ingot, collar by collar, by the actions of the Guild itself—and considering that the Guild, left unchecked, could present a true threat to the Timeless Order, the other anacreons have never understood why the Sovereign of Chains set Brem Marst among their ranks. The man is a genius, to be sure, but also an obvious threat with divided loyalties.

The answer is simple: Marst bought his position. He spent decades researching the Order after joining, poring over countless documents and records in the bowels of the Counting House, even questioning the Uddshua when their dispositions permitted. He learned something of the history of Urun Kugsith Lugal, and deduced the Sovereign's darkest and most bitter secret. Then, like any good merchant, he set about providing what his prospective customer truly wanted.

Marst got in touch with several gods he had known from his living days, leveraging some still-relevant blackmail in exchange for gossip from Heaven. It took nearly two centuries to complete the legwork, but in the end he was able to present his proposal to the Sovereign: a position among the anacreons in exchange for a complete record of Siuna Qan's Exaltation, including the identity of its latest incarnation.

Marst continues to follow the movements of that Exaltation's bearer as part of his duties to Lugal—not the simplest of tasks given the inherent difficulty of observing Sidereals, complicated even more by the necessity of operating from the Underworld. Nonetheless, he dutifully reported the death of the Exaltation's bearer twenty years ago during a botched Wyld Hunt, and endured Lugal's rage when his former wife's spirit once again failed to appear in the Underworld. After some searching, he has recently located Siuna's newest incarnation, and makes plans to contact the young Sidereal.

guilty conscience. The Timeless Order is not above harrying living members of the Guild, driving them to an early grave with spectral torments or lethal mishaps. Even when wraiths of the Order behave themselves, openly meeting merchant princes in shadowlands to trade in goods and souls, they count their profit as much by the discomfort of the Guild as by their gains.

In the far East, at the shadowland known as the Arbor of Black Blossoms, the merchant prince Vandel Kö meets

once a year with the ghostly trader Mourning Lash, intent on buying wood from a grove deep in the Underworld whose location only Lash knows. When burned, the smoke that rises from this bone-textured wood reveals visions of the past lives of the mortals who inhale it. Each year Kö brings 70 dream-eaten slaves and 70 lengths of rope with which to hang them upside-down from the trees of the Arbor; Lash permits him only as much time to haggle as it takes for the slaves, throats slit one by one, to bleed to death.

Where possible, the Guild seeks other trading partners in the Underworld. Sometimes they barter in goods and services that are of no interest to the Timeless Order, such as with Dazra and Irivande (see p. 23). At other times they do direct business with the Deathlords and Abyssal Exalted, powers on par with the Order—and no less treacherous.

The Guild does a thriving business with the Skullstone Archipelago, for example; although Darkmist Isle has no need of slave labor, it is always eager to import foreign foodstuffs, textiles, dyes, and lumber for its ships, paying in gold dredged up from the bottom of the sea. In occupied Thorns, the Guild has discovered the Mask of Winters eager to engage in trade of almost any sort; the Deathlord is especially keen to see luxury goods from the city's artisans exported to the markets of Great Forks, Nexus and Lookshy, the better to demonstrate the civilized nature of his occupation.

The merchant prince Deliah Grey recently purchased the entire population of the village of Charred Grove from Tireless Eye of the Raiton, an assassin and spymaster of the Day Caste. Tireless Eye claimed the village had harbored insurgents against nearby Thorns, and accepted a tidy sum in silver in exchange for bringing them to Grey's caravan in chains. In truth, the village harbored Eye's mortal wife and infant daughter, conceived in secret; the Abyssal exchanged the location of his unopened First Age tomb for Deliah's promise to safely relocate his family far away from the Mask of Winters and his agents. The Guildswoman's protégé, a strong-willed youth named Challo, is currently weighing the difficulty and projected profit of mounting an expedition to plunder the tomb against the simple expediency of bringing the village to market and convincing Deliah to avoid Thorns in the future.

Still: For every merchant prince who sensibly avoids deals with the dead, there are many ghosts eager to seek out the Guild. Hungry for revenge, power, memory, prayer, or simply warm blood, the common dead have little enough reason to let the living be—and then there is the Timeless Order, which targets the Guild especially. It dogs the path of caravans and haunts the halls of factors, proudly wearing the blood the Guild has spilled and holding the chains of retribution the Guild has forged, ready and waiting in the shadows—an unabashedly feral po counterpart to the Guild's professional and polished hun.

The Guild has formed a relationship with the Chernozem in response—one based not in coin, but in connection to the Underworld. Ghosts follow the Guild wherever it goes,





and so do the Liminal Exalted. Only recently has the Guild begun to contract with these ghost hunters and sorcerer-exorcists to rid themselves of their dark visitors, making the presence of a Chernozem common to any Guild caravan traveling through or around shadowlands. What compact binds the Liminal Exalted to the Guild is unknown, for most show little interest in silver and jade. Some say that it is their duty and their nature to hunt that which stalks the night. Others say an interest in harvested organs and limbs draws the Chernozem onto the payrolls of the Guild.

The merchant prince Casim Thurat is a canny trader with a single flaw—a conscience. For the last two years he’s been trading bulk loads of obsidian, chalcedony, and soul-

eaten workers to the Mask of Winters for use in construction of the Deathlord’s various monuments within Thorns; he’s also been smuggling weapons into the city and refugees out. A Liminal calling herself Dame Crimson oversees his security. Since joining the caravan she’s successfully driven away the ghosts who’d haunted Thurat since his early days as a river pirate, silenced two wraiths that discovered Casim’s smuggling activities and sought to reveal him to the Mask of Winters, and fought off a wandering hekatonkhire. Thurat considers her indispensable, though the Chernozem unnerves the drovers and caravan fleas, and the caravan god has openly despised her since she seduced its handler-priest some months ago.



CHAPTER FOUR

A GAME OF MASKS



There is no commodity that the Guild cannot acquire and sell. Whatever spectacles of mercantile adventurism raise a factor to wealth or plunge a merchant prince into destitution, the rest of the Guild makes note and goes on counting its silver. When a drover is lost on the road, there are new hires at the next town. When a merchant prince's investments collapse, his lost wealth remains in Guild-dominated markets that feed back to the coffers of the factors. Even hierarchs who have attained heights of power hardly conceivable to the masses of Creation—even they are surrounded by rivals waiting to replace them.

This may seem to diminish the perceived stability of the Guild, and call into question how it has endured for centuries, but this practiced lack of sentimentality is one of

its first and strongest bulwarks in a world full of fiery warlords and eloquent enchantress-queens. Any Terrestrial Exalt might stroll into a Guild disbursement office and, with the Thrashing Carp Serenade, bring that office's commerce to a standstill—but there are always other offices. A road god can curse the caravans of the Guild to months of broken wheels and mud pits, yet there is no lack of new caravans. A Fair Folk noble might capture the love and dedication of even the most jaded merchant prince. This is only an opportunity for other Guildsmen to vie for the poor fool's crumbling empire.

Still the question remains: Against the Charms, spells and stranger powers of Creation, what can a merchant prince do to avoid being crushed under the tread of the mighty?



A FAIR WARNING

"If you take the Guild down, you'd better be ready to fight, because you'll have to conquer Nexus, and you won't be able to stop there, because Lookshy and the Confederacy won't let a despot hold a sword to the beating heart of their commerce. And if the Seventh Legion falls, here comes the Realm from one side and the Arczeckhi Horde from the other, and any nation where there's still a Guild presence will be lining up to take a run at you. So if you're ready to fight the whole world and spill an ocean of blood, then strike true. Just know that I'm a Guildsman and I told you fairly what you'd be buying."

—Ru Habosh, to the Dawn Caste holding a daiklave to his neck

BECOMING THE MASK

The principle of the dispensability of any given Guildsman is known as the philosophy of the Eternal Ledger. No matter who is lost there are others to take their place. Plague or war, popular rebellion or imperious decree, or their own rare, disastrous missteps—a Guildsman may be destroyed, but the Guild endures. Of course, the replacement of a stevedore or the sale of opium through a third party is hardly a triumph to a world-spanning trade empire. It is in the offices of merchant princes and factors that this ethos makes its greatest returns, because even those in highest authority are less important than their offices. The merchant may be a one-in-a-million bargainer, but mortals die, profits are reinvested and neither would matter much without fellow merchants. The Guild is the legacy of all Guildsmen.

When a merchant prince dies or makes a bad investment, his replacement steps into a market that has likely existed for centuries. The predecessor's successes often carry an office forward with little trouble. Becoming the steersman of national commodities is certainly no mean feat, but it is something that will be done by someone, even if they do not work for the Guild. As such, those who take up the mantle of a fallen Guildsman may at small remove seem to hardly differ from the previous Guildsman. Trade contracts are honored, profits are maximized and imports continue. This sometimes lends the Guild's leadership a mystical reputation, as the swift replacement by similar

officers evokes an eerie continuity and stability that serves the organization well.

With the titles and holdings afforded to them, and the distance they maintain from other members of the Guild, it is difficult to determine where one hierarch's identity ends and another begins. Further immortalizing them is their extensive use of proxies and body-doubles, making even the most public deaths uncertain affairs. After prominent leaders' brushes with mortal danger, rumors often crop up that the real hierarch died and has been replaced by an assistant. In a few instances this has proved true, but so long as the impostor continued to buoy the Guild's fortunes it was hardly considered an offense to soothe the worries of trading partners and strike fear into the hearts of assassins.

Even if the rumors outstrip the truth by a wide margin, it remains a fact that to appropriately represent or masquerade as a ranking Guildsman requires familiarity with the Guild's policies and holdings. Many hierarchs use this to their advantage, deliberately occluding who they truly are even in their contacts with other Guildsmen. While many have body-doubles, some hierarchs go so far as to create false estates on which those doubles can live, serving no purpose other than to mislead foes or to safely negotiate with dangerous trading partners such as Dragon-Blooded.

While there is a roster of commonly accepted hierarchs at any given time, thanks to these measures it is unclear if any of them are truly hierarchs or even if they constitute the entire Directorate. There is no shadowy conspiracy at the heart of the Guild or some secretly divine merchant-lord

HOLLOW MASKS

Some factors and hierarchs become especially concerned with the danger of being replaced by their proxies, and a common solution has emerged since trade with the Fair Folk has increased. While the greatest innovation in Guild knowledge retention cannot be used by the dream-eaten (see *The Immortal Ledger*, p. 63), its origin bore more than one fruit. Another extrapolation of the knowledge-transferring gemstones allows a Guildsman to impress important facets of another personality on a dream-eaten slave, restoring Virtues and Willpower to them after a fashion. This state is built upon a rotten foundation and is doomed to collapse after a few days, but when combined with the knowledge transmission of third-breath gemstones such slaves become nearly perfect simulacra and are amongst the best proxies possible. The process of creating such a proxy is costly and difficult, involving the destruction of the adamant gems used to grant the dream-eaten a new life.

For more on the "dream-eaten," see *Graceful Wicked Masques—The Fair Folk*, page 179.

guiding the whole organization, but it is unlikely that the true roll of all the hierarchs is known to any but themselves.

THE TOP OF THE HIERARCHY

The greatest public faces of the Guild are also amongst the most secretive; though most concerned with supernatural scrutiny, hierarchs try to avoid too much public attention from all quarters. However, they remain the highest authorities of the Guild and are the ultimate targets for any negotiations made with it. At least nine hierarchs regularly occupy the Guild Tower in Nexus, and while they are all figures of note, some are better known than others, whether thanks to their own incaution or some preference for greater social influence or fame. Below is a selection of hierarchs that characters may encounter as they cross paths with the Guild. There are others.

HIERARCH ARYS SHEN

Hierarch Arys is an old man, whose present fame lies almost entirely with his continued ability to sit on the Directorate despite his decrepitude. When he was young, before becoming a Guildsman, he was leader the Obsidian Monkey Gang, a ruthless but efficient band of thugs that grew into one of the greatest criminal groups in Nexus. Eventually, as Arys's smuggling operations began to extend far beyond the Riverlands, the Guild was sufficiently impressed that they absorbed his organization into their ranks. A scant year after attaining the office of factor he attempted to wrest complete control of a large portion of the Guild from the hierarchs of the time. His near-success was skillful enough that the Guild's retribution was relatively light, but it is likely Arys' antics delayed his becoming a hierarch for a decade or more. His shrewd criminal instincts kept him from suffering any further setbacks, but many believe his wits have dulled and he rides the momentum of his factors, clerks, and a roster of trading partners overly-comfortable with his face.

The truth is that Arys Shen is content with his wealth and has dedicated himself to the ideal of the Guild. Though it must remain hidden, the hierarch prizes not just the profits it brings but the fact of the Guild's existence. Without it, the world would be less. His actions move beyond the realms of the markets and deeper into political and social influence than most other hierarchs. A particular pursuit, which may be his downfall, is Arys' expansive research of the third-breath gemstones (see p. 64), delving more deeply into their interactions with ghosts. Arys is preoccupied with the Timeless Order and hopes to curb its influence, and to this end his savants have developed a gem that can capture the higher souls of dead men before they depart their bodies. Not only does this deprive the Order of another conscript, these new gems can still be used to provide information and training to the living. The hierarch has built up an extensive library of the gems, large enough that the Directorate would be rightly suspicious of his motivations.

HIERARCH USATEN

Deep in the South lies Baten village, populated by trusting folk with red-veined black marble for skin. Some are carried away to adventure and eventually sold by the frequent Guild caravans that pass by on their way to and from the Madu fire-harvesting fields. That is how Usaten left her home, but when in a single night she transformed her pitiable belongings into fortune enough to rent a wagon, the caravan master took interest, training and refining her talents to better ensnare wealthier fools. Eventually, Usaten turned her sights on her master, and in a circuitous plan that is studied by clerks and merchants to this day, she exploited the tax and slavery laws of Nexus and a spare window of time when the caravan master would not have access to his funds. She won her freedom, a large portion of the caravan master's wealth, and the attention of more powerful Guildsmen.

It wasn't long before she became a merchant prince herself, and then a factor. Her habit of conning Guildsmen as much as anyone else, and failing to be as subtle about it as she could be, both helped and hindered her path to the Directorate. It's hard to tell if she is simply more discreet or less treacherous now, but as a successful hierarch most assume the former. Usaten remains young enough to have many more years to trick whole nations into dribbling their wealth away into her pockets, and she enjoys putting that wealth to good use in the finer establishments of Nexus. Some say that she seeks escape from her mean and rural past, but she keeps close ties to the slave-trade and funnels many into her personal service. She appears sympathetic to those disenfranchised by slavery, encouraging protective laws and rewards as great as freedom for loyal service, yet she is responsible for opening up hundreds of new slave markets across the Threshold. She recently finished a hard-fought trading war that ended with her acquisition of the cartel that owns the routes around Baten village, but what she plans to do with her home is uncertain.

THE LADIES OF SALT

Hendrika Niesink unofficially oversees much of the Guild's hard trade. It's said that Niesink's nickname, the Lady of Salt, is because "none of the flesh she carried with her ever spoiled," but it's known that rebellious slaves under her factorship would be whipped bloody and dragged across salt pans, their agony a lesson to those who resisted the yoke. Her racy, coarse nature is equally well-known. A famed Northern beauty in her youth, Niesink was never charismatic or likeable. Nonetheless, she took hundreds of lovers and no less than ten factors as husbands, whose serial unwillingness to display pattern recognition or sign prenuptials fueled her rise to factor and hierarch. She is eminently detestable by design, and never seen without orichalcum-laced rings on each finger of both hands, matched with a tremendous star-sapphire ring on her left hand. The real Niesink survived numerous assassination at-





tempts, but could not survive execution by the Emissary for the way she ran the hard trade in Nexus. Unwilling to risk a scandal, several of her lovers replaced her jewelry from her life as a black widow with mote-battery rings that Solar god-kings provided to thousands of loyal followers. “Her” jeweled ring is Dragon King artifice; powered by the others, it generates a constant illusion immune to most common forms of detection. Using their ex-lover’s nature as a cover to prevent anyone from noticing an imperfect impersonation, the factors of the conspiracy deeply enjoy their status as joint hierarchs, and are considering expanding their mummery outside of election season.

GAVIN BAST

Gavin Bast was a master weaponsmith based out of Port Calin until he joined the Guild 30 years ago. An Earth Aspect Dragon-Blooded, Bast’s rise through the ranks of the Guild was nonetheless meteoric. His work as a jade foundry operator put him in control over a number of Exalts who could forge weapons and armor from the five magical materials, and his contact with Dragon-Blooded artisans in the Realm and Lookshy put him on the cutting edge of jade forging techniques. His dedication to profit eventually saw him ascend to the Directorate, where his unwavering charisma and his ability to lure the Exalted into Guild contracts made him one of the most popular hierarchs. However, Bast fell from grace when the Directorate orchestrated a war between hierarchs.

Bast responded by trying to secede his portion of the Guild to preserve it should the whole collapse. In the process, he made off with an armada of ships laden with Guild treasure, and a fortune in armor and weaponry now worn by Nexus mercenary companies under his control. In response, the other hierarchs informed the Guild’s enemies of his whereabouts, the cargo he was carrying, and that there would be no repercussions for damage done or goods lost, as hierarch Bast’s freight and soldiers no longer belonged to the Guild. As it crossed the Inland Sea, Bast’s armada was beset by Lintha pirates, raiders from the Peleps navy, and freebooters from as far away as Coral and Denzik. Swarmed by enemies on all sides, Bast’s fleet engaged in one of the greatest naval battles of the last century. Bast lost his entire fleet and washed up on the shores of the Marukan Alliance.

By the time he made his way back to Nexus, the young hierarch knew that he’d been set up, and at massive cost to the Guild. When he asked the Directorate why they had done it, the answer was simple: they had wanted to see which way he would jump. Rather than working to preserve the Guild, he did that which Exalts are wont to do, and tried to end the conflict by taking ownership of the Guild. Thus Bast lost his seat on the Directorate.



Later hierarch Dvora Odom explained: “The Guild doesn’t survive because the hierarchs live. If they die or are ousted, new leaders will emerge. Business will continue. The same cannot be said of the kingdoms of the Exalted. Where have they all gone? The daimyos and the caliphs and the dukes of old? They built their world upon a tower that could only ever fall one time.”

But Bast’s fall from power did not presage the end of his role in the Guild. Just the opposite: Gavin Bast remains one of the most popular and influential factors in the Threshold. These days, he lives with his lover Luzao. While he still oversees the Guild’s Exalted artisans, Bast’s pet project is luring lost eggs away from the Realm and giving them lucrative jobs and housing within the Guild, with certain stipulations for the roles their offspring will play in the Guild’s future. He hopes that by raising Dragon-Blooded within the Guild environment, and providing them with all the training and education that they would receive in the Realm or Lookshy, that he can build a contingent of Terrestrial Exalts who see the Guild as their father.

Bast is a striking young man, slender and angular, with slightly longer arms than normal. He often carries a newly-forged reaper daiklave, for which he has shown proficiency. His armor is famous: it is lined with black leather over black jade, and decorated with hundreds of jade coins from the Realm.

LACAN MERCER

For some, the journey is everything.

Lacan Mercer has always been a man of ambitions and indiscretions. His vices led him to be blackmailed into working as a slave-breaker for Athan Volk, a Guild flesh broker. Mercer refused to employ the brutal methods demanded, preferring instead to empower his subjects, turning them into masterworks through which his art flowed. In this fashion Lacan produced exquisite slaves of talent such that they were sought the world over. But his unwillingness to use brutality drew the wrath of his employer, who threatened to reveal his secret and ruin him. Still, Mercer would not harm his charges.

His paradox drew the fascination of the Lunar Alcina, who was watching and deciding whether or not to kill him. She became infatuated with Lacan when he refused to explain why he was working for such a cruel monster, and took it upon herself to unravel the mysteries of his past. After learning the secret he was trying to protect, she freed him from Athan Volk by dropping the slaver into a furnace and turning his slaves out to stoke it as hot as they liked. The two disappeared into the night.

This is the dream of Lacan: To travel the world and see its wonders, and to sell those wonders for miracles greater yet; to be a purveyor of goods and needs and appetites; to empty the world of its riches; to sleep on a mountain of gold one night, then lose it all and start again the next morning; to build up palaces and burn them to the ground.

The Guild is the vehicle for his ambition, for who else can sell a king his crown and then buy it back from him? Alcina has made herself Lacan’s greatest commodity in his rise to power, and the task of selling the Lunar again and again has become the great test of his mercantile skill. She has been an assassin, discreet and inescapable; a spy, slipping through courts and harems and bureaus to uncover the secrets of the mighty. Once, in the beginning, when Mercer had no money and nowhere to begin, she became a prostitute of matchless skill and beauty, slipping effortlessly between shapes and genders to empty the purses of eager clients, single-handedly raising her salesman the fortune he needed to initiate himself into the Guild. Lacan will never forget the loyalty Alcina has shown him. His empires are hers, and all that he saves—and all that he destroys—is in tribute to her.

Mercer currently holds the rank of factor, financing a host of caravans, brothels, expeditions and shipping concerns. The state of his finances rises and falls with his moods, but he knows there’s always another fortune to be made. Lacan waits for the next call to elect a new hierarch, wondering how high he can climb and what it will be like to free-fall from the top of the Guild.

CATHA VOS

Catha Vos is a secretary to the Directorate that might be assigned to a newly appointed hierarch. She is a trusted associate, minds her manners, keeps quiet, and seems to know what the nearest hierarch wants before he even asks for it. Her ability to sort and interpret data has earned her respect in the council chambers. She is sometimes asked to interpret the files she has been asked to bring to the table, and often gives her superiors a concise read on the information, including what she reads between the lines, and her instincts are often spot on. Though she only holds a clerical position in the administration and is not personally wealthy, she has proven herself an asset to the Guild, and the hierarchs think well of her.

But they do not know the truth. Catha Vos was once an orator named Til Vosath, who came to speak openly against the Guild’s efforts to spread into her town. Had Til’s voice not been so strong, her arguments so persuasive, the Guild would never have known her name. But her voice earned the Guild repudiation, and they organized her disappearance. They would have killed her, but the merchant prince who carried out the order had heard her speak, and knew that a great part of her arguments leaned on the Guild’s inhuman traffic with the raksha. In what he doubtlessly considered a touch of poetic brilliance, he had her spirited away from her home in the middle of the night and delivered to a fae noble with an appetite for social militants.

When the raksha coiled himself around her soul, he sipped her breath and liked what he tasted. So he bit deeper, and soon Til Vosath was no more. But her story did not end there. Sometime later, a Defiler found the empty husk of



the orator standing outside a town forum, and saw how her eyes tracked from speaker to speaker, as if she were yearning to understand, as if there were still words inside her, buried deep. But soon she would slacken, her eyes would lose their luster, and she would fade into a silent heap, cold and thoughtless, and she could not even project sadness or loss, because she was empty and could not burn for thoughts that would never come. Compelled by what she once was, the Warlock touched her, and lit her hollow mind with a spark that once fired the universe.

On that day, she became Catha Vos. Soon after, she joined the Guild. Ever since, she has continued to excel within the organization, making herself indispensable as an organizer, a thinker, and a supporter of the hierarchy. Now she uses her closeness to the Directorate to learn any secret she can, and bides her time until she will learn that which will allow her to wreak terrible vengeance. Recently, she has learned one of the musical poems which will allow her to access one of the animated intelligences housed beneath the Directorate chambers, but when she used it she blacked out. To this day, she is not sure why she lost consciousness or exactly why a person named Til Vosath haunts her dreams and seems to speak back through her reflection urgently, with a stifled voice, as if trying to warn her...

THE TWO-STEP MAZE

While hierarchs and many of their subordinates avoid supernatural encroachment by avoiding the presence of supernatural entities, the charisma of the Exalted can sway courts and nations with a few simple words. The Guild has been thriving through this difficulty for centuries, and where similar organizations adopt some of the same policies to survive government scrutiny, the Guild has honed itself into one of the most supernaturally hardened groups by virtue of its arrangement.

The Guild recognizes the metaphysical importance of group identity, and the difficulty that magical beings have in molesting larger groups. Thanks to this knowledge the Guild strictly compartmentalizes itself by keeping its offices small and highly independent. While merchant princes' personal empires are often comprised of thousands of laborers, craftsmen and clerks, only rarely does a Guild satellite office's membership number in the thousands. The loss of an office is unfortunate, but they tend to be small enough that they can be quickly replaced, and while they may be subverted by magical means the next step up the ladder is often the insurmountable entirety of the Guild.

To manipulate the Guild requires entering the arena of national economies, contending against the vast treasuries and networks of factors and merchant princes across Creation. The simple but potent weight of commerce proves a more daunting challenge to Charms and spells than the loyalties of soldiers to their general. Of course, it is better for the Guild to befriend than to offend, especially in the case of the Exalted. If the powerful magic of these beings

can be put to use, the profits are rarely outstripped by the costs of flattering and suborning them. Regardless of their usefulness, the most potent supernatural allies of the Guild are held at arms' length. They tend to be granted absolute control of whatever local market they wish to command, but that market is then carefully and subtly surrounded by an array of mercantile firebreaks and potential enemies. Most Terrestrial Exalted canny enough to understand the source of their independence usually content themselves with the vast wealth this partnership brings.

MONEY ILLUSIONS

A woman speaks to demons through silvered lips that hide her silver tongue, a green sun burning overhead. A man tempts a fae prince with dreams of the two of them entwined in a bed made of scrip. A wide-eyed merchant prince, risen above his station, is swayed by the burning words of the Terrestrial Exalted even as his more skilled subordinates work feverishly to subvert the Dragon-Blooded while the demigods are focused on a catspaw.

In economics, risk is everything; investment is a game of chance. Only fools trust results to a roll of the dice; the money is always on stacking the odds in your favor. Or, better yet, loading the dice—so long as no one knows that you're not playing on an even field. The key to strategy is not to choose a path to victory and hope it works out, but to ensure that *all* paths lead to a victory.

The Guild is made of mortals, along with a few aberrations—Exalts, God-Blooded, and the like. They are an organization, not tied to a particular nation or people. Many seek to use them and abuse them, never dreaming that in dominating the weak, they have tied themselves to an entity far larger than they.

The Guild seeks to make itself endemic to the structure of trade in the Second Age. In the face of gods, fae and the Exalted, nothing is permanent, but this is a truth that does not serve the Guild. They want the great powers of the world to believe in the omnipresence of the Guild—an aura of inevitability is just as good as an aura of invulnerability.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Guild claims to eschew politics and violent action. They are without overt agenda, ostensibly interested only in trade, production, and resources. These are lies: there is nothing more political than conflict over resources. Those who won't work with the Guild find themselves driven out of business and far worse. The very word "guild" comes from the organizations that skilled artisans formed to regulate their craft, allowing them a stranglehold on those who refine and produce goods—influence over the market and the distribution of labor. Guilds are an exclusive practice, one that the larger organization has adopted.

From the animals pushed on by drovers, to the wool sheared, to the dyes harvested from the sea, to the artisans who refine it and the merchants who sell the finished finery

to noblemen who dine on lamb and feed their servants salt mutton: the Guild seeks to have a hand in the entirety of the process. They seek economies of scope and scale. By controlling the vertical, the Guild is able to manipulate itself into a monopolistic position. Leveraging that over control of related markets lets the Guild expand.

MARKETS GROWN AND HARVESTED

Two shisha dens in Great Forks served the same variety of customer, and had for years bitterly competed against one another. Faced with the sharply-rising price of supplies, the dens went to war—literally—and one was burned to the ground. Both establishments were owned by Five Coins, a local merchant prince, whose payoff on the arson's insurance was substantial and subsequently reinvested in his surviving den (once Five Coins stopped manipulating the rise in prices).

The Guild well understands the power of monopolies to generate tremendous profit; it also understands that, over time, monopolies inevitably ruin economies and nations. Rather than abandoning the power and profit of monopolies, the Guild instead has learned to harvest markets in a cycle of boom, bust, and recovery. The Guild finances competing businesses (or nations) through proxies, setting them at one another's throats until either a talented winner emerges, dominating the market (who is then inducted into the Guild upon discovering the true nature of his long-time financiers); or until squabbling businesses weaken the market enough

for the Guild to move in and take over directly. Thus a monopoly is established, which the Guild ruthlessly exploits for every dinar it can wring from the region.

Once the monopoly has run its course, the Guild finances the rise of local businesses or foreign investors who push out or buy up piecemeal the monopolized business's assets, and begin a rehabilitation of the economy. This slow recovery also feeds the Guild's coffers, until the market is strong and vital once again, at which point the Guild sets its interests against one another and begins the drive toward a new market monopoly. The principle works at every level, from shisha dens to warring states.

Why drive an exhausted market into destruction when with a bit of foresight it can be harvested again and again? Long-term sustainability, kept lean and profitable by punishing cycles of bull and bear, tied into a network of the fruits of trade from caravans: this is the aim of the Guild.

BULL AND BEAR—THE ROLE OF GUILD FACTORS

The fact of the matter is this: becoming a factor requires both massive wealth and a huge number of connections, years of proven loyalty and cunning business acumen as a merchant prince. Factors have hands in convincing demon princes to urge Malfeas to leave one of his layers uncrushed for years to preserve a valuable silo of demon grain. They have teased secrets and emotions from the centuries-dead into memory stones, sold to the quick. One factor, the Smiling Prince, personally oversees the





trading of rare *green motes*, narcotic patterns of energies. When asked where he acquires them, he grins ever-wider and tells them the motes are collected from the Shores of some place *far away*.

Such things are without price in and of themselves, and they cannot be replaced easily. Merchant princes are not truly appointed factorhood, they are recognized to have it. Though subservient merchant princes are always waiting in the wings, they usually do not possess the resources to *succeed* a factor, let alone replace one. If a factor is lost, it represents an enormous amount of risk and a loss of investment opportunities. Enormous temporal power simply *does not* accumulate without decades of work, even for those with inherited personal fortunes or economic genius.

Still, the Guild has options. The organization encourages factors to keep a great deal of their wealth in material holdings: palatial estates, farms, mines, ongoing systems of bribery. Should a factor perish or be removed, these holdings can be reclaimed in the name of the Guild for a song. Most factors realize that they are being set up as cogs in the machine, yet the Guild takes no pains to hide this fact. A gilded cog is still a cog, but it is gilded, and for many that is enough. Though factors typically practice conspicuous consumption, only the indolent have huge vaults of silver within their manors. By the time a merchant prince rises to the rank of factor, she realizes the best place for her wealth is *making more wealth*. Thus, many factors tie their money up in the caravans of the Guild. This means the majority of capital is inaccessible for potentially long periods, but also ensures their fortunes remain untouched by anything less than a widespread calamity. It also ensures that their untimely personal demise will not harm investments already made. The collapse of an international industry, such as the firedust trade or Marukani steeds, will ruin a factor. A burgled estate or stolen purse will not.

The Guild is well aware that adequate precautions mean they rarely have to deal with the loss of a factor. Nor does the organization truly have to *do* anything to prevent the loss of a factor, as the ascended princes do that themselves. Merchant princes are vulnerable to the newly-Exalted or enemies who benefit from a sudden windfall; factors work hard to render themselves immune to the vagaries of fate. By the time one is recognized a factor, they have a truly prodigious commitment to profit and power and a great deal of experience with forward planning. They are also well-practiced at defending themselves from assassinations and ruination, due to a tremendous number of enemies made. Factors are well-defended with layers of the finest guards wealth can afford, coupled with thaumaturgic and sorcerous rites, inhuman artifice, bound or allied demons and elementals, hellforged wonders, and oneiromantic beasts.

If an individual is powerful enough to defeat a factor so paranoid that they had their naïveté forged into a cat

(that was then strangled), they must *also* be truly fanatical and well-connected in their own right—and thus, there's very little anyone could do to stop them. In such circumstances, there's often very little recrimination from the Guild, and such individuals are better kept off-balance by handling them with courtesy. More than one factor has been adopted when they murdered their predecessor following a years-long campaign of vengeance. With the loss of such a clearly important personal goal, the Guild reasons, wouldn't they like a new project? An Exalt furious at the enslavement of their darling sibling can be outright stupefied—and more importantly, *pacified*—with the sincere offer of a villa, a paying job and the freedom of their relation. Most heroes would love to believe they'd turn down such an offer, which is why such deals are always well-spiced with an investigation into what the hero values (so the Guild can offer good things for them, too) and the promise of the offending practice's reform. The newly-minted factor watches their fortunes shrink away if they don't trade slaves; in time, the Guild reasons, the idealists will see things their way. Even if they don't, they'll still turn more of a profit than no one at all.

WHAT MAKES A FACTOR?

Mechanically speaking, a Guild factor's Backgrounds are impressive. Factorhood requires *at least* Resources 4, and a combination of Allies, Influence, and Backing (Guild) totaling twelve dots (with none below a rating of 3). Factors *may* possess outside Backing, but ratings of 3 or higher, or Backing representing a clear conflict of interest for the Guild, severely inhibit one's rise. They *generally* possess high Willpower and Conviction ratings, with Motivations and Intimacies focused on a will to power through monetary control. In story terms, becoming a factor is the result of years of building up one's reputation as a merchant prince, greasing countless palms and publicly demonstrating profit motive. They must have tremendous amounts of Capital at their command. Supplemental Backgrounds—Followers in a cult of personality, Spies and Contacts to represent a personal communications network—are common amongst factors, oft found at high ratings. The world does not permit such a splendid mask without investment.

GILT DRAGON OMENS— DEALING WITH THE SUPERNATURAL

To say the Guild is a mortal organization is an incomplete truth. Mortals are fragile creatures; they have few protections in a demon-haunted world. What humanity

has always had, though, is a keen awareness of its own fragility and position. When mortals contend with gods and raksha, they must play them against each other. Everyone has things they need and care about.

In RY 663, the god of the Rolling River decreed that his doctrine of free river travel meant that all who traveled on his river were free; when Guild-aligned slavers attempted to drive barges down the river, they found themselves wracked with storms, logjams, and maddening riverbank proselytizing. The hard traders responded by damming the source of the river, ordering a mercenary force to besiege the god's river-island temple and depriving Great Forks of tallow used to make particularly efficacious prayer candles. Faced with worship starvation, the loss of importance of his purview and divine pressure from superiors used to the tang of An-Teng-cinnamon candles (which all river gods adore, though none really know why), the god quickly reinterpreted his doctrine to the surviving hierophants.

The Guild is not merely tolerant of the Hundred Gods Heresy; they seek to spread the words of heterodoxy to the four pillars of Creation. The Guild is at ease dealing with the little gods. Though many are as temperamental as any raksha, gods have clearly-defined and easily-demarcated resources and goals. Unlike the Fair Folk, gods are *literally* power defined by belief; a skilled Guildsman is intimately familiar with this concept, finding many allies and few rivals amongst the divine. Regional cults are bolstered by trade, and in turn, the gods apply their cults and their might to supporting Guild activities. This is not simple control, but symbiosis, benefiting both parties. Then again, control lies within any mutually beneficial relationship—it just depends on how much one partner values the other. As in everything, the Guild seeks to make their services invaluable, such that severance is crippling.

Gods of geographic locations are the easiest to handle. Southeastern mountains may suffer landslides and strip mining, or they may see representations appear in the scrimshaw artwork of the North. The rivers of the Scavenger Lands can see an increase in trade, or they may become the Vermillion Legion's favorite latrine spot. As long as a god oversees some direct, tangible part of the world, they can see a benefit or decline from the Guild (or anyone else, for that matter). Gods of widespread or intangible concepts, such as libraries or mathematics or the pounding drum-and-sitar music popular in the tropical Southwest, are far more difficult to influence. Fortunately, they rarely care about traders, though when they do, the Guild goes out of its way to appease them, as it can be bothersome (and unprofitable) to strongarm them.

When the Guild *needs* to strongarm the divine, few methods work better than worship starvation. A god may be unassailable by mere mortals, but their cults are just as mortal. A sudden lack of donations to a temple is often the first sign; traders refuse to sell to priests, who cannot attain necessary sacrificial items. On the way back from market, the

ordained are accosted—and murdered—by beggars armed with fine steel. The very cult that sustains the divine begins to wane and fade. A god so weakened then finds himself prey to a new and more powerful god, adored by an army of supplicants, their temple coffers filled with coins of silver. As the defeated god feels his grasp slipping, he may turn desperate, attacking his followers, or even the competing spirit. Such behavior often leads to divine retribution at the hands of vengeful spirits, the Immaculate Order, or the Exalted. Everything changes the moment a god alters their stance on the mortals who do such a service to the community. The god's name is whispered in far corners of Creation, their priests reacquire rare reagents, and the god's Essence flows freely and strongly. For those willing to play ball, the Guild can offer much.

One of the surest lessons in international trading is that *nothing* exists within a vacuum, not even divinity. Cults and rulers are often focused on themselves, but the wise look both outwards and inwards, and the Guild has learned their lessons well. If a recalcitrant deity refuses to budge on a position of trade or blessings or curses, the Guild is well aware that such a deity has superiors and inferiors in the courts of the gods. Methods that cause worship glut or starvation to a deity work exponentially better when selectively applied to those *around* a problematic god, rather than solely against a god themselves. Sanctions from one's bribed superiors are endemic in the corrupt courts of the Second Age, and the Guild deals in currency of all stripes.

COINS AND PRAYERS

In RY 628, the odious ruler of Red Hills found himself compelled by local factors to expel all priests of the god of the Maruto River from his nation or force them to swear allegiance to a local canal god instead; his ostentatious lifestyle fueled by exotic drugs and slaves, he readily agreed. The god complained bitterly to his courtly superiors, who refused to accept his complaints on the grounds that they were not submitted in triplicate on rice paper. Their silk-paper refusals stank of cinnamon incense.

Some gods don't need to be bribed, but the Guild does it anyway. Heaven is full of those who enjoy the status quo facilitated by Guild operations, and they work—hard—to ensure the Guild continues operating the way it does. It is well-known that spirits throughout Creation are motivated by avarice, and this is the only aspect of religion the Guild whole-heartedly supports. Though the Guild has no *de jure* dedicated god, there are still several gods dedicated *de facto*. To name a few, Rabszolga, God of Slaves (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV: The Roll of Glorious Divinity I**, p. 58), Laughing Ragamuffin (see **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. III: Yu-Shan**, p. 141), Golden Reverie (Yu-Shan, p. 138), road gods (Yu-Shan, p. 55), the caravan gods summoned by the Ritual of Exodus (**Roll of Glorious Divinity I**, p. 31) and to a lesser extent Blue Crest Merchant (Yu-Shan, p. 135) all are dependent on the Guild for either





existence or their current level of subsistence, and all are powerful gods within their bureaus. The Guild lavishly maintains priests to these gods—it keeps them happy, even as the Guild’s actions augment their considerable clout in Heaven. Such divine patronage extends both ways; key elements of Heaven have a reason to act on the Guild’s behalf before a beleaguered merchant prince whispers a prayer. If that means intervening when a troublesome Exalt interferes with Guild operations, well, most gods never had it so good in the First Age.

Arigen, God of Silver, is a tall, elegant man with silver skin and long silver hair, dressed in cloth-of-silver robes. In return for the Guild’s abundant prayer, Arigen works towards silver’s ascendance over jade as the value standard of the world. He lobbies hard for salt and cowries to remain strictly local currencies; in this, he is aided by Yin-Yuan, Goddess of Coins, who feels a fierce rivalry with the God of Paper Currency and inhibits his concept from spreading beyond the Realm. Appearing as a beautiful woman garbed a heavy chain of linked currencies, particularly Guild dinars and Realm obols, Yin-Yuan’s alliance with the Guild puts her at odds with those gods who object to her efforts to boost the dinar by debasing and devaluing national currencies. While Yin-Yuan is in the Bureau of Heaven for now, subordinate to the God of Value and Desire, she seeks reassignment to

the Cerulean Lute. After all, so many people see money as the source of serenity (or the cause of their unhappiness).

The Guild’s staunchest ally in Heaven is likely Fenya, a god of the Fourth Rank and the bastard language-god of Guild Cant. Possessed of the hybrid vigor of a thousand loanwords and assimilated linguistic Charms, worshipped by the dedicated cryptographers and ombudsmen of the Guild, Fenya appears as a terribly tall man wearing merchant’s robes, adorned with a cloak of a thousand different feathers. Brusque and crude, he’s capable of poetic turns of phrase when discussing trade. Naturally, this attitude and his line of thinking follows the cadence and patterns of Guild Cant—his mind is a slave to his speech, and he can only speak and understand the secret vernacular of the Guild. Unlike the vast majority of gods, language-gods cannot speak Old Realm, and while they usually can’t perceive words without codification into prayer, language laced by Essence stands out from the murmurs of thousands. It is difficult for him to enact change through the Bureau of Humanity, for few gods speak Guild Cant, but he manages to order about subordinates through emphatic gesticulation until they learn. Though his dedication to the Guild was previously unwavering, the Directorate is aware that worship accorded to Fenya cannot be used to bribe other gods, especially ones not so reliant on the organization—such as Boz Miklós, the

god of Riverspeak, who enjoys tremendous influence and obeisance by providing the same services Fenya does. He looks at his empty shrines in Guildhouses and broods on his lone feast day, and considers how his power might grow if he sold his language and services to the Denzik and the Realm. Now, how to communicate the offer...?

LINGUA FRANCA

The strongest language-gods hear every word spoken, see every word written—but only for their language. Fenya may strip the meaning from anything said in his tongue or imbue an innocuous statement with terrible import. He doesn't do this for merchant princes or factors who do not heed his cult, though he will certainly act to counteract a threat to the Guild entire (seeing as how his existence depends on it, at least for the moment). It is worth noting that Guild Cant is, often enough, the only language Guildsmen from different Directions and cultures have in common other than Riverspeak—and that god is in the Guild's pocket, too. The following are panoply Charms specific to Fenya, though all language-gods have variants for their own language.

- Fenya may pay 6m to remove the meaning from any social attack made in Guild Cant, perfectly parrying attacks (even unblockable ones) for all listeners (no matter the distance, though Fenya must be aware of it—a simple ritual prayer to Fenya at the opening of argument will get his attention). The attack is still clearly spoken but carries no import, and may be dismissed by the targets without a second thought.

- At cost of 4m, 1wp, Fenya may render any social attack made in Guild Cant undodgeable and unnatural, no matter the speaker or distance. The arguments of the attacker become impossible to ignore, forcing targets to either respond with cogent Charm-based counterarguments or concede the point.

- All Charms that utilize Guild Cant as a vector are Obvious to Fenya regardless of distance, so long as he pays 1m to react. He may pay an additional mote to nullify any supernatural riders or Charms carried along Guild Cant as a Shaping effect. Most other language gods are legally prohibited from using their variants of this Charm, with violators facing high-Severity audits due to an infamous countermagic incident in the Early First Age involving the god of Old Realm. Fenya and Boz Miklós escaped this troublesome legislation by being the only new major language gods to attain significant power after the Usurpation—most other language gods find themselves grandfathered in under the Exalt-created Directional languages of the First Age.

FEEDING HUNGRY DREAMS

Conflict between the Guild and the Fair Folk is inevitable, from a certain point of view. A factor's rise and fall is determined by the success of his risks; the Fair Folk reside within a world of living myth, where the success of risk is determined by one's narrative. Those factors that tend towards the philosophical fall into two camps: those who believe thesis and antithesis need not be at odds, and those who are horrified by the synthesis that comes from dealing with Rakshastan in the long-term. They have no qualms or pangs of conscience upon beholding the soul-eaten—no factor gets to their position without destroying a few souls here and there—but instead claim to have a sense of *history*. The raksha have tried to destroy Creation before, and nearly succeeded but for the Empress. Should she die or disappear, Creation would have little defense.

This has led to a quiet but extremely deep and volatile schism, one that extends even to the Directorate. Those who deal with the raksha take great risks, but reap tremendous rewards—wheels made of a hundred hands that allow a wagon to climb mountains, Fae-Blooded servitors who can help a caravan skirt the edges of Creation and cover thousands of miles in a day, huge pieces of the slave market, gospels of prosperity to alloy the narrative of a merchant prince. The benefits are enough to buy off or drive away those without the courage of their convictions. Thus, dissenting factors that refuse to deal with beings benignly dangerous to Creation *at best* and malignantly chaotic at worst are often driven to seek other ways. For centuries, the long-term trade with Wyld barbarians of Creation's borders has been supplemented with iron weapons and thaumaturgical talismans (something both sides of the debate see as simple prudence), and Guild halls in the hub cities have seen gossamer weapons unsheathed more than once. Though none speak of it openly, the issue of trade with the Fair Folk is one of the chief elements factors consider when the time for Directorate elections comes around.

In the modern day, a conspiracy has arisen in the hubs, aided by the organization's long-term association with the Raiton Academy on Nightfall Island. Combining the hard trade with undead sorcery, the conspiracy hopes that this will deter the raksha from another Crusade. Xenocide is their aim, not an improvement of the fragile *détente* between Creation and Rakshastan. Scavenger lords, plying the ocean shore of the deep Southwest, discovered a First Age Lunar's sunken laboratory nearly two decades ago. Though his notes were fragmentary and incomplete, they spoke of a radical project—rehabilitation of the raksha. The notes never spoke of long-term success—only short-term triumphs—but this was enough. Coupled with the limited success Zal Zäl enjoyed, the conspiracy has fashioned a weapon from the ancient experiments.

If a slave is a bit more listless and passive than usual, raksha consider them fit for little more than a quick ban-



quiet. By the time slaves reach Neshi at the Lapis Court to be funneled throughout Rakshastan, their spirits have little resistance left. The Fair Folk consume dreams overlaid with techniques distilled from the Exalt's vision. They consume Virtues deeply tainted with necromancy.

The conspiracy knows enough about Fair Folk culture to know that the weak are preyed on by the strong; they fervently hope that the afflicted raksha will be consumed, spreading the necromantic pacification. They hope the Wyld itself will absorb the sick, permanently stilling the tides of lunacy. They do not know of the Unshaped, or that Rakshastan is a nation of exiles; they do not know that the raksha they fear are, in fact, the weakest of their kind (and the friendliest to humanity, all things considered). What results dreams of peace weighted down with tainted Virtue will have, none can say. The conspiracy has introduced foreign magics into the ecosystem of the Wyld, and whether the apex predators of madness will adapt or succumb to the toxins remains to be seen.

MORTAL SHADOWS DRAPED IN WONDER

The bottomless coffers of the Guild are filled with more than just money. As purveyors of any and all goods

and prospectors after any saleable commodity, Guildsmen constantly seek, build, buy and sell artifacts and talented magical beings. Like the money, mercenaries and slaves they use to shield themselves, merchant princes, factors and hierarchs take just as much advantage of the potent treasures and strange entities the Guild makes available.

Hierarchs in particular tend to carefully select large retinues of Essence-channeling God-Blooded whose powers and ambitions lie outside the realms of finance and far-reaching economic and political influence. Still, they do not shirk on their bodyguards' education, and seek those who are not stupid enough to believe that they can simply take what the hierarch has. Any hierarch's entourage is likely to include a few mystically potent warriors, skulks and even a sorcerer. Terrestrial Exalted are studiously avoided, since they are so difficult to control owing to their grand passions, longevity and capacity to master any aptitude in short order.

One of the most common artifacts amongst even the modestly rich merchants of the Guild are privacy veils (*The Books of Sorcery*, Vol. III—*Oadenol's Codex*, p. 31) and their many variants which include vision-thwarting censers and flooring that produces noise when trod by trespassers. Other artifacts commonly employed

NEW NECROMANCY SPELL

For over a decade, the conspiracy has been funneling slaves around the Nexus routes and laundering them through Nightfall—but the relationship the Academy has with the Guild goes back much longer. Since the school's inception, necromancers have been dependent on the Guild for reagents, supplies of fresh corpses, and an ad-hoc intelligence network—when factors hear of promising students or rumors of powerful practitioners of the dead arts, they can expect a finder's fee for letting Nightfall know. Should another Balorian Crusade arise, the conspiracy will begin acting openly, corrupting the Virtues of Wyld barbarians with more powerful necromancy and throwing them directly into the oncoming tide, choking invaders with poisoned souls. It will buy some time to arrange a dimensional exodus to the Underworld and Malfaeas, if nothing else.

The Academy also sees a great deal of traffic from factorial funeral caravans on their way to Sijan, even if the deceased passed far from Nightfall; often, these caravans are funded by the factor's successor, though as to why, few can say. Raiton Academy is important to the Guild entire, not just for the conspirators.

WAKES ARE FOR THE LIVING (SHADOWLANDS CIRCLE)

Cost: 10m

Target: One deceased being

Not all necromancy was codified by dead Primordials or curious Celestials of the First Age; like the Guild, the necromancers of Nightfall found startling success in methods overlooked by more puissant savants. This spell effectively replicates the Consume the Mind step of the Dark Path of Consumption, consuming a dead mortal's brain to gain access to their memories. In a raucous ceremony in which tales of the deceased's life are related, the necromancer consumes a mortal's brain (dead no longer than a year, though more than a week's decay necessitates a Resistance roll) and gains access to the mortal's memories as if they were faded remnants of the necromancer's childhood. Remembering minor details requires an Integrity roll with a difficulty set by the Storyteller, but as retaining a mortal's memories indefinitely requires a commitment of 5m, there's time enough. This spell cannot be used on a being without a brain or one that had a higher Permanent Essence rating than the necromancer. The Guild dislikes the Academy knowing so many of their secrets, and loathes that the necromancers *charge* for them, but there's few better ways to tease secrets from the dead—no one wants to consult the Timeless Order without especially good cause.

by hierarchs and some factors and merchant princes include voice- and identity-masking fans and veils; clothing which affords an arrogant sense of superiority to others; hall draperies that echo strangely to enhance their owner's words and weaken guests'; and special papers, ledgers or pens that when used to make contracts bind signatories in powerful magical oaths. When dealing with especially dangerous magical negotiators, hierarchs will often make use of double-sided mirrors that conjure mirages. These allow them to appear to occupy one room while staying safely in another, avoiding physical contact and mitigating or eliminating the effects of magical influence.

When they must negotiate with potent gods and Exalted, hierarchs favor retiring to Guild-commissioned manses. At a minimum each of these buildings will feature the *Veil of Shadow* power. Manses protected by *Impenetrable Shroud Architecture* are highly prized, but if the manse is purpose-built for hosting negotiations priority is given over to combinations of *Hidden Passages*, *Mela's Sweet Whisper*, *Analytical Senses* and *Puzzle Manse* to eavesdrop on guests and confuse trespassers, and *Integrated Utility Artifacts* (**Dreams of the First Age, Book II—Lords of Creation**, p. 121) to cut down on the need for God-Blooded assistants or other artifacts to maintain privacy veils and similar artifacts. Hierarchs, when they must be present in the building at all, will do their best to observe a representative or double from a distance. (For more on manse creation and powers, see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**.)

While it is required that the sorcerer-adjuncts of Guildsmen be practiced with the Infallible Messenger (**Exalted**, p. 254), even those ever-faithful cherubs are mistrusted. Guildsmen with the greatest authority and most sensitive knowledge still prefer to communicate with trusted messengers and carefully constructed ciphers. To hierarchs the most important spell a sorcerer-adjunct must know is Private Plaza of Downcast Eyes (**The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The White Treatise**, pp. 55-56). Other spells are valued but not vital additions to a sorcerer-adjunct's repertoire, particularly Coin of Distant Vision and Disguise of the New Face (*ibid.*, p. 40 and p. 43). Such warders are highly prized by factors and merchant princes as well, but the Directorate tries to ensure that most such assets remain under hierarchy control.

THE IMMORTAL LEDGER

The Guild's true lifeblood is information. Without its web of partnerships, accounting sheets, negotiations, debts and marketplaces, the vast trade network could not exist. In the organization's never-ending pursuit to perfect the Eternal Ledger, one of the most doggedly researched applications of Essence use is knowledge retention, so that contracts and investments might never slip away. Ultimately, it is hoped, all ventures can be hidden in the minds of merchants, leaving their hirelings and slaves to be taxed, punished or

IMPENETRABLE SHROUD ARCHITECTURE (THREE- OR FIVE-POINT MANSE POWER; EBON DRAGON, SIDEREAL FAVORED)

TERRESTRIAL CIRCLE SORCERY

By thoroughly integrating the principles of subtlety and privacy into a manse, the designer may shield a room within it or the entire building. For three points this power duplicates the effects of the spell Private Plaza of Downcast Eyes and the manse power *Veil of Shadow* (**The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, p. 71), but only to protect a single room within the manse with no dimension greater than (Manse rating x 5) yards. For five points, the entire manse gains these benefits.

waylaid by governments and bandits. All balances will be remembered, all debts shall be collected.

Artifacts that retain, convey and protect information are amongst the most important to the Guild as a whole. While exceedingly rare, resplendent personal assistants are one of the most popular accessories to a Guildsman's panoply. Rarer still are versions that do not require enlightened Essence to function. Similar versions of recorders of everlasting glories are also very popular. Highly sought after within the Guild's ranks, those that pass from their hands into the broader market are usually sold out of desperation for funds or to spite a rival's desires. Wayward assistants tend to quickly make their way back into Guild hands, usually after an unusually severe series of economic setbacks for the buyer. More advanced informational devices, such as the omniscient literary adviser, disappear in murky webs of transactions until they find their way unremarked into a factor's holding, there to be used or to languish according to the policies of the Directorate. (See **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. I—Wonders of the Lost Age** for more on the mentioned artifacts.)

More common are silver brushes and audient brushes (**The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, pp. 32-33), though few Guildsmen outside the offices of upper management can acquire them. Equally popular and only a little less common are cipher blotters, swimming inks, infinitely folding scrolls and artifacts that offer unbreakable encryption that can only be dispelled by uttering the proper phrase. These minor utilitarian artifacts rarely have equivalents made for mortal use, but the thaumaturgic ritual *Wonder-Grasping Apperception* is common amongst those who would use them.

One of the tools in pursuit of the Eternal Ledger that may prove most potent comes from a discovery made a few centuries ago. In the Threshold a team of Guild explorers stumbled upon a crumbling temple-city, its streets lined with



piety-focusing plinths and labor-enhancing tabernacles. At the city's center, strange and separate from the alabaster buildings around it, the explorers found an irregular conical structure made from unlovely metal panels covered in adamant trceries.

Even after a team of savants discovered the way inside, the structure remains both a closely guarded secret and a complete mystery. Many of the machines discovered within still lay undisturbed, their titanic bulks looming over artificers who after centuries of study have yet to comprehend their most basic functions. Among those artifacts that the Guild has successfully recovered were a series of orichalcum plates inlaid with starmetal and moonsilver bas-reliefs, sarcastically referred to as Our Most Opulent Blueprints.

These plans outlined the construction of receptive bits of adamant which were found to have surprising qualities. Some could trap hungry ghosts, while others sucked vitality or memory from unfortunate victims. After long study, the Guild's cabals of savant researchers have made a recent breakthrough. Etched with starmetal-infused ink patterns invoking the office of Taru-Han, Lady of Souls, these "third-breath gemstones" allow holders to impress memories and knowledge into them for later recall by themselves or others. Their use requires extensive training and intense concentration, but continuing refinements in their creation may lead to devices that can preserve all the knowledge and experience of Guildsmen that would otherwise be lost.

A WALL OF MORTAL PRAYERS

In their attempts to avoid supernatural entanglement as much as they can, the Guild's leaders ironically turn to gods quite often. As traders in human lives, the Guild can hold hostage a large number of prayers with which to tantalize recalcitrant and useful divinities. Long-established factor's offices tend to fall under the benedictions and protections of more than few gods, and every hierarch's enclave is shadowed by powerful protective spirits. Most of these beings are not especially powerful as far as the Celestial Order is concerned, leaving them to their dalliances in mortal affairs, but the mere fact of their assistance can be a surprising counterbalance against the arrogant power of other divinities and the Exalted. Simply becoming immaterial is not enough to sneak into a prepared factor's home, and while a hierarch is unlikely to survive a direct conflict with an Exalted warrior, the assassin will first have to get through a retinue of cult-bribed warrior spirits.

More personally empowering for Guildsmen are thaumaturgical rituals, an expensive but affordable practice for the leaders of the Guild. Nearly every key power base is heavily shrouded in skillfully applied and dutifully maintained rites from the Art of Warding and Exorcism (see *The Books of Sorcery*, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex, pp.

141-144). While the power of the spell Private Plaza of Downcast Eyes is often enough and favored when available, hierarchs also make regular use of the thaumaturgical rituals *Warding of Undue Influence*, *Privacy-Sanctifying Rite* and *Shadow Majesty Ward*. These are usually sufficient to deter intrusive spirits, but the variety of threats that exist and the expense of these wards requires that other supernatural enemies be met with specially-tailored rituals only when rumors of their activities surface. However, even the barest whisper of lurking danger is enough to trigger a flurry of activity in setting up such wards.

THE SUN SETS ON THE GUILD

For seven centuries the Guild has spread constantly and effectively across all of Creation, its tendrils even reaching into the Underworld, the Wyld and Malfeas. Over its long, cosmopolitan history it has brokered deals with the empires of the Deathlords, the courts of Rakshastan, and even the Demon Princes of Hell, buying and selling wares that the lords of entire realms of existence could find nowhere else. Demons and gods alike dismiss any given part of the Guild for the modest power of its members and widespread but meager bulwarks against magical might, yet they sorely covet the scope and reach of the Guild, which has endured all these centuries to the Time of Tumult.

For all their endurance in a world teeming with divinities and Chosen, the Guild's preparations were never tested against the widespread presence of the Solar Exalted. Thanks to the Wyld Hunt, the Guild never lost more than a few offices to Solar subversion over its entire history. Now, when the Lawgiver threat is most urgent and nearly omnipresent, all the privacy veils and mystically occluded mansions in the world cannot preserve the Guild against the surging tide of Exalted power.

Now that entire circles of Solars gather to singular purpose, traveling across Creation to forge new immortal empires and to topple all the old orders, the Guild is endangered. It will start subtly at the edges, Threshold nations turning to Solar trading cartels with more and greater wonders, and better prices; eschewing those Guild offices that still hold out against the allure of working for perfect golden bargainers. New nations will rise beyond all others thanks to treasures only the Solar Exalted can provide, markets that the Guild can never touch, rivals the Guild cannot hope to buy out or destroy.

The Lawgivers have not returned to pick at the edges. As the Guild fights harder against Solar encroachment, this can only inflame their animosity. Fewer Guild offices will be subverted and more will be economically or bodily shattered.

Eventually, the last, unimpeachable bastion of the Guild will be the only one left: Nexus. The hierarchs will hide in their now spare offices, bereft of whatever they could sell to keep Guildsmen employed or to bribe the Council of Entities to give them mercenary companies

RITUALS OF THE ARTS OF THAUMATURGY

Wonder-Grasping Apperception (1, Intelligence, 3, one minute): This expensive procedure from the Art of Geomancy affords a character the ability to use a targeted non-weapon, non-armor artifact as if it were attuned as long as that would cost no more than 3m. This lesser attunement breaks after only an hour's bodily separation and is automatically overridden by any other form of attunement or magical control. A character may have attuned no more than one artifact through this ritual at any given time.

Privacy-Sanctifying Rite (2, Intelligence, 3, one hour): This ritual from the Art of Warding and Exorcism requires gold-infused anointment of all walls and portals within a room with no dimension greater than (ritualist's Essence x 5) yards. The room must be at least partially sealed for the sake of normal privacy, even if just with fur hangings. Threshold successes on a successful roll (minimum 1) apply as an external penalty against normal Awareness rolls to detect stimuli within the warded room. Half this penalty, rounded up, applies against rolls to enact magic that displaces an outside character's senses into the room (such as *Scrying*). Magic that explicitly fails against wards may still function against this one, requiring their usual roll or, if they are absolute effects, entering Charm conflict roll-off with the thaumaturge rolling (Intelligence + Occult + Essence). The scrying Charms of the Celestial Exalted and titans add (user's Essence) extra dice to roll-offs against this procedure.

Ward of Determination (2, Wits, 4, Miscellaneous action): When Guildsmen of import must truck with powerful supernatural beings, they turn to this ritual from the Art of Warding and Exorcism to ensure they remain dedicated to something other than the whims of gods and demons. Swallowing a purified, precious stone, the ritualist invoking this procedure gains an ablative shield against unnatural influence. For the next five hours successful use applies (threshold successes, minimum 1) as an external penalty against social attacks and similar mental assaults that impose unnatural influence. If the attack is still successful and it would cost 0-1wp to ignore, it is negated and the penalty from this ward is reduced by 1; if the influence would cost 2-3wp to ignore, the penalty is reduced by 2; and if it would cost 4+wp to ignore the ward collapses as it vainly attempts to negate the influence.

It is said that in their decadence factors and hierarchs end their meals with snacks of diamond and ruby. While not strictly true, this ritual's duration can be extended to a full day by consuming a chip of adamant or similar mystically potent stone.

Shadow Majesty Ward (3, Manipulation, 1, 10 minutes): Invoking the Secret Name, an invisible pall covers the thaumaturge or another character he is touching, protecting the target from magic that discerns her identity and desires. This ritual from the Art of Warding and Exorcism does not aid physical disguises, but applies an external penalty of (threshold successes ÷ 2, minimum 1) against sensory effects that would inform an observer of the Backgrounds, Intimacies, Motivation, relationships or intentions of the target, as well as similar non-systematized traits or relationships. This will hinder actions like Read Motivation (see **Exalted**, p. 131) and powers such as Courtier's Eye Technique, Consumer-Evaluating Glance and Know the Soul's Price (see **Exalted**, pp. 214-215), or Revelation of Associates Hunch (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—Dragon-Blooded**, p. 166).

with which to protect themselves or to reclaim lost territory. Confident and untouchable, a circle of Solars will descend upon the Guild Tower, their sorcery and Charms shredding the Guild's feeble wards, turning every clerk and bodyguard to their own service. All the false walls of adamant shall crack open, every impenetrable shroud shall be torn away, and the hierarchs will cower before the new golden lords of trade.

Finally, the Emissary shall appear and hope will shine from the hierarchs' faces, sure that even these god-kings cannot stand against the strange might of Nexus's immortal protector and the voice of the Council of Entities. Then it will turn to the triumphant Solars and it will watch as they wrest the last secrets of the Guild from their offices. To do otherwise would disrupt trade in Nexus.

MARKETS BLACKENED AND BURNED

With their information networks reaching even into realms outside Creation, the Guild is better informed than many about the goings-on in those strange places. This is why they fear the Solar Exalted, but are properly terrified of the Abyssals. For all their attempts to incorporate the depredations of the Exalted host into their plans, the deathknight threat is impossible to be entirely proof against and completely devastating should it occur.

Unlike their Solar counterparts, clever Abyssals would begin at the heart of the Guild, murdering the Directorate and devastating the Nexus offices before being driven off by the Emissary. Thereafter they may wreak havoc with their market-slaying words and Guildsman-slaying knives, wandering the world to watch the rudderless and scattered



Guild offices scramble to fill the vacuum left by the dead hierarchs. Those factors and merchant princes that survive longest will become desperate, seeking hostages and doomsday plans of their own that avail nothing against the inevitable, crushing grip of deathknights glorying in the mission of the Neverborn and the Void.

LOOKING TO THE THIRD AGE

The creation of the Abyssals and the return of the Solars isn't a hopeless situation for the Guild. They've been at the game of power and money for generations, and the things that buy and sell mortal hearts can just as easily ensnare the Exalted. The Guild has been careful to tread lightly around the powers of the Terrestrial Exalted and gods, and to ally with them when convenient; surviving in

a world of Lawgivers and deathknights only requires that they be more careful, that they make more alliances. The words, wards and weapons of these Exalted, backed by the bottomless coffers of the Guild, may allow the organization to soar to greater heights than ever before... and may also protect them from the other Exalted who have no interest in a Creation with a Guild.

Already they make preparations for the coming hardships. More Dragon-Blooded mercenary-captains have been hired recently than ever before in living memory, and an unprecedented number of Terrestrials have been granted high office within the Guild itself. A Night Caste Solar and his Lunar mate, comfortably installed in the finest apartments of Nexus, make regular patrols of the streets around the Guild Tower.





APPENDIX COUNTED AND WANTING NOT

While social combat effectively resolves short term disputes between individuals or an orator's stirring call to riot, even mass social combat rules don't address the extended struggles of ruling a domain. Power and wealth must be nurtured and protected against the envy of others and the looming cataclysms of the Time of Tumult.

The rules in this appendix are collectively known as the Creation-Ruling Mandate. They define a set of extended and dramatic actions that may be taken using Bureaucracy, Socialize and (to a lesser degree) War to describe the actions of organizations as they implement large-scale projects. The success or failure of these actions determines how effectively an organization implements its agenda or wastes resources on fruitless endeavors. It is the system of princes and merchants, gods and generals, and the games they play with lives and fortunes.

WHAT DO I USE THIS FOR?

In its most straightforward application, the Creation-Ruling Mandate resolves actions and projects undertaken by organizations, such as the Guild's money-making ventures and socioeconomic warfare, and those of Solar-built companies opposing the Guild. However, in addition to modeling a merchant prince's machinations, the Creation-Ruling Mandate can *also* describe a city-state's rise to power, the founding and spread of a religion, the fortunes and hardships of a mercenary company, the scheming of rival political movements within Nexus, large-scale war between the Great Houses of the Realm, and any other organization-based tale Storytellers and players would care to tell.



OVERVIEW

In brief, this is how the Creation-Ruling Mandate functions:

Organizations are defined in three ways: through their *Policy*, *Structure*, and *Assets*.

Policy describes why the organization exists, and what it strives to do (and not to do). It is composed of an organization's Motivation and Intimacies. See page 75.

Structure describes the organization's relationship with other organizations—whether it is independent or part of a broader organization—and who is allowed to take actions on its behalf. See page 75.

Assets describe the resources an organization has at its disposal, acting as a mixture of Backgrounds and Attributes. They define what an organization can and cannot do, and how well. There are **five Assets**: **Size**, **Influence**, **Competence**, **Reach** and **Wealth**. See page 77.

Assets generate **Capital** for an organization, a kind of fuel that drives projects. Capital must be committed to fuel **Leadership Actions** taken on the organization's behalf, much as motes are committed to power Charms. Leaders attempt to wisely invest their Capital in well-chosen actions that expand their organization's Assets, execute its Policy, and attack rival organizations. See page 81.

All of these elements are explained in greater detail below.

DIAGRAM OF A LEADERSHIP ACTION

Leadership Actions proceed in a number of simple steps, presented here for easy reference:

- Decide which Leadership Action is to be taken. Then determine whether or not the character possesses sufficient authority to take the action, and whether the organization's Assets are adequate to carry out the project.

- Determine the dice pool to be used.
- Assign base difficulty, which is also the action's Capital cost.

- Assign cumulative difficulty and interval.
- The player decides how much Capital to commit.
- The action's first interval is a planning period. At the end of the planning period, the player must succeed at one roll to move on to the actual project; threshold successes during the planning period do not add to the project's cumulative total.

- Once the planning period has been completed, the project begins. At the end of each interval, the player rolls the appropriate dice pool, building successes toward his cumulative total.

- Upon accumulating the required number of successes, the action succeeds (if sufficient Capital is invested) or fails (if insufficient Capital is invested).

THE CREATION-RULING MANDATE IN ACTION

Organizations interact with the world of **Exalted** and with one another by taking Leadership Actions—ex-

tended rolls with varying intervals, base difficulties and cumulative difficulties, modified by various bonuses and penalties depending on the organization's Assets, Policy and Structure.

As an example: The Delzahn mercenary captain Ajav commands a small, skilled company of fighting men based out of Chiaroscuro. His organization has Size 3, Influence 1, Competence 3, Wealth 3, and Reach 4, giving it a total Capital value of 14. He wishes to increase the fighting quality of his troops, and so undertakes a Grow Asset action aimed at raising the organization's Competence from 3 to 4. He plans to do this by putting his mercenaries through a period of rigorous training, tactical drilling, and mock battles, until group maneuvers and battlefield tactics are second nature to them.

Since Ajav is planning to train the group in pure tactics (he wants them to be able to fight as though he is leading them even when on independent assignment) the Storyteller decides Intelligence + War will be rolled to carry out the training.

The Storyteller then evaluates Ajav's plans and assigns the task a base difficulty of 4, based on the fairly elaborate training maneuvers Ajav has in mind. This also determines the action's Capital requirement—because the base difficulty of the Leadership Action is 4, Ajav must invest at least 4 of his organization's 14 Capital into the action if it is to succeed.

Next, the Storyteller consults the Grow Asset action (see p. 71) to determine its cumulative difficulty—the number of threshold successes Ajav will need to accumulate over the course of multiple rolls in order to successfully carry out the project. The formula given is $(3 + [(Size + Reach) - Competence] + \text{desired new Competence rating of } 4)$ for a total cumulative difficulty of 11. It will take 11 threshold successes for Ajav to raise the organization's Competence.

Finally, the Storyteller sets the action's interval. The Grow Asset action suggests an interval of one month, but the Storyteller feels that Ajav's mercenaries can make meaningful progress in their training a bit faster than that, and so sets the interval to three weeks instead.

Ajav must now decide how much Capital to commit (he can commit the base 4 demanded of the project, or can over-commit extra Capital to grant himself bonuses and as a hedge against future problems with the project). That done, the project's first interval is a *planning period*, during which Ajav secures training grounds, draws up training regimens, and collects his troops and clears their schedules for the training to come. He must succeed at one Intelligence + War roll to take care of this necessary preparation before the training can begin.

Once this is done, the training begins properly. Three weeks later, Ajav makes his first roll and begins accumulating threshold successes...

TAKING LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

When a leader commands an organization to implement (or halt) an agenda, the order itself and the resulting implementation is collectively referred to as a Leadership Action. Leadership Actions are a form of extended action (see **Exalted**, p. 122), considered ongoing from the time they begin until they end in success or failure.

Leadership Actions are always context-sensitive, relying on the Storyteller to evaluate what the characters are trying to accomplish, the resources they are bringing to bear, and the context in which the action occurs—and to use the Creation-Ruling Mandate system to model events accordingly.

DICE POOLS

Unless otherwise specified, Leadership Actions may use Charisma, Manipulation or Intelligence. Charisma-based leadership relies upon sincerity and passion. The character seeks to make the organization act in accordance with his own values and follow his example. Manipulation encompasses leadership based on guile, taking advantage of known biases, outright deception and any agenda predicated on ulterior motives. Intelligence combines the intellectual acumen to formulate a good plan with the social prowess to turn that plan into action, often through efficient delegation of tasks to well-suited ministers and functionaries.

The majority of commands are rooted in Bureaucracy, directing members to carry out the organization's Policy. Socialize is used to shift or reinforce an organization's Policy in some way. War allows for effective deployment of military force.

Players only roll the dice pool for a Leadership Action at the end of its intervals, when that action is complete, meaning success or failure isn't known prior to investing time, effort and resources.

DETERMINING DIFFICULTY AND CAPITAL COST

Leadership Actions have a suggested default base difficulty and cumulative difficulty. Base difficulty indicates the complexity or challenge of carrying out each step in a project, while cumulative difficulty is indicative of the sheer amount of work that must be invested to bring a project to completion. The values given for each action are a default suggestion, which the Storyteller should modify as seems appropriate to the particular projects being undertaken.

In addition to base difficulty and cumulative difficulty, each project has a Capital cost—an amount of Capital which *must* be invested in the project if it is to succeed. **An action's Capital cost is always equal to the project's base difficulty (not cumulative difficulty), unless otherwise stated.** Unexpected complications and attacks from rival organizations can sometimes raise a project's Capital cost after the project begins.

INTERVAL

Leadership Actions are extended actions, with a base difficulty and cumulative difficulty (see **Exalted**, p. 122). Each Leadership Action suggests a default interval most appropriate to actions of its type; an organization's Size also impacts the interval of its actions, as larger organizations take longer to bring their enormous manpower and resources to bear, and to communicate necessities throughout the organization. Should an organization's Size-dictated default interval be slower than an action's suggested default interval, use the Size-dictated interval instead. **Storytellers should adjust the intervals of Leadership Actions should another time frame seem more appropriate for a particular project—if the suggested interval seems too slow or too fast to appropriately model the project being undertaken, replace it with something more appropriate.**

BEGINNINGS, SUCCESS, FAILURE

Having determined the appropriate dice pool, base difficulty, cumulative difficulty, Capital cost and interval, all Leadership Actions begin with a planning period. This is the first interval of the project, during which the organization maps out the project, gathers resources, and prepares for the undertaking to come; on a Guild caravan, this equates to gathering the wagons and goods, hiring drovers and recruiting a caravan god, and so forth. In the Creation-Ruling Mandate, this start-up period means that one successful roll *must* be made simply to begin a project; no successes from this first successful roll count toward the project's cumulative difficulty. They simply allow work to begin. If things go according to plan, this means that only the project's first interval will be spent on planning and preparation; an unlucky project might take several rolls before it sees a successful roll, allowing proper work to begin.

Rolls are then made at the end of each interval, accumulating successes toward the completion of the project. When the project accumulates the required number of threshold successes, it ends.

A successful project is one which produces enough threshold successes to meet its cumulative difficulty, and which does so with enough Capital invested in the venture to meet the action's required Capital cost at the end of the project.

A project which produces enough threshold successes to meet its cumulative difficulty, but does *not* have sufficient Capital invested to meet the action's required Capital cost, has failed. The organization recoups half of the Capital invested in the project (round down); the remainder is lost, and must be recovered with a Replenish Capital action (see p. 73).

A *botched* roll during the course of a project indicates that it has encountered absolute disaster. The project automatically fails, and *all* Capital invested in it is lost.





CONVEYING ORDERS

One important consideration to keep in mind is that a Leadership Action can only begin when the organization's membership becomes aware of the leader's wishes. In the case of active, far-ranging leaders, this could mean a delay of weeks or months as couriers or ships must convey commands back to the organization. Large groups often establish networks of horse relays, messenger birds, heliograph towers, and other such communications methods to minimize their reaction time, while organizations with access to magical resources such as Infallible Messenger may enjoy the advantage of instantly delivered commands.

COMPLICATIONS

A number of additional elements may impact Leadership Actions, in addition to the basic resolution detailed above.

AUTHORITY TO ACT

Only those with recognized authority within the organization may take Leadership Actions, and only those actions they are authorized to take. Often, this recognition involves tiered positions of formal responsibility within the official chain of command. For example, the director of a department has authority to issue orders to her own department, but cannot command the larger bureau to which she belongs. Her division head can act on anything that involves the entire division, but not the entire organization, etc.

Not all authority is so formal, however. Advisors and viziers often wield more power than those they ostensibly counsel, at least so long as they retain the ear of a leader willing to implement their ideas. It does not really matter how the character secures the cooperation of an authorized leader, only that she does. She can seek to persuade, threaten, beg or even apply mind-bending social magic to enslave the figurehead outright. It is also possible to "borrow" authority by successfully impersonating a leader and issuing orders as that person (a Lunar specialty) or forging written instructions from them. **Acting through a proxy or false identity imposes a -2 internal penalty to all Leadership Actions unless otherwise stated.**

AUTOMATIC FAILURE

Numerous factors can make a given Leadership Action impossible for an organization to successfully implement. In particular, Assets abstract much information into a single numerical rating, forcing Storytellers to use discretion and common sense when deciding whether an organization has what it needs to complete a task. It is especially important to factor in ongoing Leadership Actions when determining available resources. As a general rule of thumb, if the Storyteller cannot imagine the action succeeding regardless

of how competent or lucky the organization's leadership is, it is probably best to invoke automatic failure. If success is simply very improbable, set the difficulty appropriately high and give the players a chance—this is **Exalted**, after all.

No Authority: When a would-be leader gives commands to an organization without having a position of authority, it's essentially like a beggar sitting on the Imperial Throne and barking orders to the Realm. No one will listen, and it's likely that some member will punish the failed leader's impudence with ridicule, if not outright violence. An action attempted by an unauthorized leader does *not* automatically fail; the organization never attempts it at all.

Insufficient Size: Organizations can certainly do more with less—it's a daily refrain of survival in the decay of the Time of Tumult. However, this only goes so far. When an action requires more manpower than an organization can muster, failure becomes certain.

Insufficient Influence: Sometimes, the desired outcome is above a group's "weight class" as a power player. A popular teahouse might influence local ordinances and business practices, but can no more spark an overthrow of the local government or change a city-state's official religion than a child's slingshot can fell a behemoth.

Insufficient Wealth: Some goals are too expensive or require infrastructural property beyond an organization's Wealth. Most city-states could not hope to produce First Age skyships, even if they had the necessary factory-cathedral as special assets. The supplies needed for such mystical construction and the exotic materials from across all of Creation are just too expensive for most nations to afford.

Outside Reach: The purpose of the Reach Asset is to measure the breadth of an organization's power in geographical terms, establishing its effective "zone of influence." If a Leadership Action necessitates action completely outside of this defined area, the organization cannot succeed. An apothecary in Nexus can take actions that affect Nexus. The operations of the business cannot affect the Scavenger Lands as a whole, nor can the shop steal customers from a rival business in Great Forks.

Insufficient Capital: If a character doesn't commit the required number of Capital points for a particular Leadership Action, that action cannot succeed. The organization may come close, especially if all other factors would otherwise indicate success. However, close is not close enough, and the resulting failure is no less absolute. Organizations in such situations may attempt to cannibalize their Assets to recover from such a situation, however (see p. 72).

Inappropriate Assets: The specific nature of an organization's Assets is vital. An enormous, illiterate clan of Wyld barbarian warriors cannot be used to catalogue a First Age library, no matter how much manpower they bring to bear on the task.

Storyline Intervention: Sometimes ongoing events within a series obviate a Leadership Action outright. If the Autarchy of Ydressa is massing a great fleet to attack the

protagonists' newly-established city-state, and the Solar heroes creep into Ydressa by night and cast Rain of Doom on its harbor, destroying the docks and the entire massing war fleet, then they have rendered the planned naval assault impossible and it fails automatically.

BONUSES, PENALTIES, COMPLICATIONS

Below are some standard complications and additional rules of the Creation-Ruling Mandate:

Stunts and Advantages: Rather than adding dice or awarding motes and Willpower, clever planning and execution of Leadership Actions should lower the actions' difficulty or cumulative difficulty. This is also true of actions exploiting advantages the characters have accumulated over the course of a series. For example, if a Solar circle saves a Western isle from destruction by a maddened volcano god and is granted the right to freely move goods and ships through its port without inspection for ten years as recompense, then any Leadership Action which exploits this friendly, strategically-placed port would certainly be eligible for a -1 difficulty reduction.

Slave Labor: Slave labor carries certain advantages in comparison to a free work force, mostly in the form of lowered overhead. As a result, any Leadership Action which primarily relies upon slave labor enjoys a -1 reduction to the project's Capital cost. However, such projects cannot enjoy any benefits from supporting an organizational Intimacy, and the organization's Competence is treated as one lower than its true rating with regard to the project—slaves are generally sullen and unenthusiastic about their work.

These bonuses and penalties may not apply in locales where slaves are granted extensive rights (such as limited working hours, or mandatory pay), as with the helots of Lookshy; nor in the case of slaves requiring careful management, such as with bound demons.

Insufficient Capital: When a Leadership Action's invested Capital drops below the value of its required Capital, all rolls suffer an internal penalty equal to the difference between the two numbers. This penalty is in addition to the risk of outright failure should the action reach completion with insufficient Capital invested.

Disaster: Misfortune may fall upon even the best-laid plans. Perhaps the port where a fleet of ships are being constructed is hit by a typhoon in the middle of the project; perhaps locusts descend upon the fields; perhaps the characters offend a politically important ally over dinner. Some such disasters may occur at the behest of the Storyteller, while others may come about due to the actions of the characters during the series. Regardless, disasters can increase the Capital cost of an ongoing Leadership Action: by one point for a minor disruption, two points for a serious disruption, all the way up to three points for a catastrophic upheaval. The most ill-fated of projects may even suffer multiple disasters. Canny leaders often over-invest Capital in a project to hedge against such eventualities.

Storytellers are urged to be even-handed in dispensing sudden natural disasters—antagonist groups are just as prone to sudden strokes of misfortune as the players' organizations are.

LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

The following are a comprehensive list of Leadership Actions that can be taken within the Creation-Ruling Mandate.

ASSET ACTIONS

These Leadership Actions manipulate and manage an organization's Assets. The leader targets his own organization with these actions (and often specific Asset ratings).

GROW ASSET

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation/Intelligence + Bureaucracy/Socialize/War)

Difficulty: 3 for simple projects, 4 for elaborate projects, 5 for ambitious projects.

Cumulative Difficulty: $(3 + [\text{Size} + \text{Reach}] - \text{Competence})$

Interval: One month

This action secures new assets for the organization, representing the hiring of new workers, the opening of new offices, improvement in the quality of personnel training, the securing of new contacts, or the generation of new revenue-producing streams.

Grow Asset actions are among the most common undertaken by organizations and are used to pursue any new, tangible gain, even if those gains would not raise a particular Asset's numerical rating. These are often strategic investments with impact on the series' ongoing storyline rather than the mechanics of the Creation-Ruling Mandate (for example, to carve the side of a mountain into the likeness of a god whose favor the organization's leader wishes to court).

Should the action be intended to raise the rating of an organization's Asset to a new value, add the Asset's desired new value to the Grow Asset action's cumulative difficulty. Assets cannot be raised by more than one point at a time (e.g. Wealth could be raised from 3 to 4, and then 4 to 5, but not directly from 3 to 5).

As an alternate strategy, a business may take a series of less ambitious Grow Asset actions that do not increase an Asset's numerical value, but instead prepare the business for later expansion, aimed at lowering the base difficulty or cumulative difficulty of a later attempt to raise an Asset's trait value. Such actions may also be taken to preserve an organization's existing Asset ratings when they are suddenly threatened by misfortune (such as when an important jade mine plays out completely, and a replacement vein must be quickly located or seized).

Of particular note, raising Wealth always deals with opening new markets or securing stable revenue streams, and never with making a single deal or sale. Such particular exchanges are best handled using social combat.





The Interval and cumulative difficulty of Grow Asset actions are particularly context-sensitive, and should be adjusted by the Storyteller to match the plans being implemented as necessary. For example, if the admiral of the Peleps navy wishes to construct five new biremes as a gift to a favored grandson, this would be a Grow Asset action, but one far smaller than the normal operating scope of the Peleps navy. As such, it would be appropriate to assign it a much lower cumulative difficulty than the organization's Size + Reach would normally suggest, as the construction requires only a tiny fraction of the organization's geographical reach and manpower.

ATTACK ASSET

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation/Intelligence + Bureaucracy/Socialize/War)

Difficulty: (Competence of target organization)

Cumulative Difficulty: ([Size + Reach + rating of targeted Asset] - Competence)

Interval: One month

Princes, merchants, priests—all have enemies, and all marshal their resources to strike down opposing organizations. This action directly targets a single Asset belonging to another organization, seeking to destroy it, whether by slaughtering an army's soldiers or degrading its morale, engaging in competitive practices to drive a rival business into financial ruin, or flooding a region with pacifying drugs to erode a rebellion's Influence with the populace. A successful Attack Asset action causes the targeted Asset to drop by one point.

Alternately, piratical measures may be taken to steal rather than destroy the targeted Asset—wooing away talented personnel, raiding treasury vaults, inducing political allies to betrayal. Such thefts may only be attempted if the target organization's Asset is higher than the attacking organization's own value in that Asset, and raise the action's difficulty by one and cumulative difficulty by 5. Success causes the target organization to lose a point of the targeted Asset and the attacking organization to gain a point of that Asset.

CANNIBALIZE ASSET

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation + Bureaucracy)

Difficulty: 1

Cumulative Difficulty: (3 + [Size + Reach] - Competence)

Interval: (Size + Reach) days

The organization sacrifices some of its resources for short term gain. If successful, the group loses one dot from an Asset rating that isn't a Special Asset. In return, the organization gains points of "temporary Capital" equal to the sacrificed Asset's (old rating x 2). Points of "temporary Capital" must be immediately committed to ongoing Leadership Actions the organization is engaged in, or else they are lost with no effect. Once a Leadership action ends, all "temporary Capital" committed to it goes away entirely and cannot be saved in reserve or committed to other projects.

DYING WITH DIGNITY

Organizations sometimes take lethal Leadership Actions—naval assaults, palace purges, campaigns of assassination, poisoned banquets. The Creation-Ruling Mandate system never automatically kills players' characters; if the system's results would seem to suggest a lethal outcome for the series' protagonists, then instead a scene detailing the deadly peril to the characters begins, providing a chance for last-ditch heroism to prevent a gruesome fate. The Storyteller may also allow such scenes at his discretion if the system suggests the demise of supporting characters crucial to the series—the Creation-Ruling Mandate exists to help facilitate large-scale stories, not to abstract or abbreviate their most dramatic moments.

Barring special magic, cannibalizing an Asset is the *only* way to increase the Capital invested in a Leadership Action once it has already begun.

Failing a Cannibalize Asset action provides only (Asset's old rating) "temporary Capital" points for use as described above. A botch forfeits the Asset dot for nothing. What the Cannibalize Asset action entails depends on what Asset the leader sacrifices:

Size: Overworked personnel suffer steep attrition from desertion, fatigue, layoffs or even deaths. The nature of this loss depends heavily on which members the leader sacrifices and how he does so.

Competence: The organization suffers high turnover as a result of demanding too much from its most talented members. Affected personnel drop from exhaustion, quit or otherwise find a way out. The resultant "brain drain" makes the overall group less effective in the long term, even though the manic burst of effort often pays off handsomely in the short term.

Influence: The group forfeits some of its power to affect people's lives, generally by taking sleazy or underhanded shortcuts that provide short term profit at the expense of the organization's reputation. Alternately, the group may simply divert resources away from policing a totalitarian state to more immediately profitable ventures.

Wealth: When jade talks, the world listens. Applying bribes, lobbying, pay-offs, salary raises, performance bonuses and other expensive operations can make friends of enemies and encourage peak performance from the ranks. Success can be very expensive.

Reach: The group sells some of its market share or contracts its holdings to focus attention on key projects. In some instances, the organization loses Reach as a result of taking advantageous action at the expense of people or institutions with greater power. A legitimate business could perform criminal activity for a surge of Capital at the

expense of being sanctioned by the law following discovery of the deeds.

REALLOCATE ASSET

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation/Intelligence + Bureaucracy/Socialize)

Difficulty: 3 for simple reallocation, 5 for long distances or complex restructuring

Cumulative Difficulty: (3 + [Size + Reach] – Competence) to reassign assets, (3 + [Reach x 2] – Competence) to move Assets

Interval: One month

Sometimes organizations must reinvent themselves to survive, and sometimes they must relocate. The Reallocate Asset action is used to do either.

Moving Assets represents redefining the organization's Reach by picking up stakes and moving—if a mercenary company is simply having no luck finding work in the Hundred Kingdoms, perhaps it will do better selling its services in Harborhead. This can bring an organization outside of the Reach of persistent rivals, or into contact with fresh new markets.

Alternately, the organization may 'juggle' its existing Assets, lowering one rating to raise another—for example, lowering its Wealth in a series of lavish feasts and bribes for local potentates in order to raise its Influence. The Asset to be raised must be rated lower than the Asset being reduced.

Finally, an organization may take a Reallocate Asset action to change the makeup of an existing asset (converting its stockpiles of cowrie shells to silver or jade, for example, or replacing its paid work force with slaves, or its slave work force with paid laborers, as market pressures make one or the other more attractive). Botches on such actions may result in loss of a dot of the targeted Asset as the organization falls into chaos as it converts from an order of priests to an order of assassins; successful actions may result in a sudden gain or loss of Competence.

PROJECT ACTIONS

The following Leadership Actions target ongoing projects, generally to interfere with them.

HALT PROJECT

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation + Bureaucracy/Socialize/War)

Difficulty: 2

Cumulative Difficulty: ([Capital invested in the project + Size] – Competence)

Interval: One week

Once men, materials and favors have been put into play, they gain a momentum of their own, and halting a project to reclaim invested resources is a task unto itself. This action must be taken when the player wishes to prematurely halt a Leadership Action, or to end a Transfer Capital or Protect Organization action at all. A project ended in this fashion reclaims all of its invested Capital.

ATTACK PROJECT

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation/Intelligence + Bureaucracy/Socialize/War)

Difficulty: (Competence of targeted organization)

Cumulative Difficulty: ([Size + Reach] – Competence)

Interval: One month

Sometimes sabotage is the order of the day—a rival organization is undertaking a Leadership Action that simply must not succeed. And so vital supplies are destroyed or bought up, key personnel are murdered, markets are flooded with cheap knock-offs, or divine allies are entreated to wrack a construction site with violent storms. A successful Attack Project action causes the targeted project's Capital requirement to increase by a value equal to the attacking organization's Competence.

CONTEST PROJECT

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation + Bureaucracy/Socialize/War)

Difficulty: One less than the contested action (minimum 1).

Cumulative Difficulty: None

Interval: Equal to contested project

Sometimes it isn't enough for an organization to succeed; sometimes it's more important to slow down a rival, or prevent him from succeeding. Unlike most Leadership Actions, Contest Project has no cumulative difficulty; its Interval is only provided to account for the action's planning period. This action allows the organization to obstruct an extended Leadership Action being taken by another organization. At each of the targeted project's intervals, the obstructing player rolls the appropriate dice pool (Charisma + War for daring raids on supply lines; Manipulation + Socialize for spreading rumors of false, damning information about a new government initiative); any threshold successes are applied to the project's interval roll as an external penalty.

A Contest Project action automatically ends once the project it is inconveniencing succeeds, fails, or is halted.

CAPITAL ACTIONS

These actions directly manipulate an organization's supply of Capital.

REPLENISH CAPITAL

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation/Intelligence + Bureaucracy)

Difficulty: 1-5

Cumulative Difficulty: (3 + [Size + Reach] – Competence)

Interval: One month

Sometimes failed projects sap an organization's Capital, leaving it with less to invest than its Assets should allow. Organizations facing such hard times may enter rehabilitative periods during which they reassure shaken members and employees, rebuild besmirched reputations, and engage in sensible (or radical!) business practices to restore depleted coffers. The difficulty of a Replenish Capital action is equal to amount of Capital the organization wishes to



replenish upon success of the action. This action cannot grant an organization more Capital than its Assets would otherwise allow.

TRANSFER CAPITAL

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation/Intelligence + Bureaucracy)

Difficulty: 1

Cumulative Difficulty: None

Interval: (6 – Competence) weeks

Unlike most Leadership Actions, Transfer Capital has no cumulative difficulty; its Interval is only provided to account for the action's planning period. This action allows the organization to lend its Capital to another organization—this can range from pulling in political favors on behalf of another to lending mercenaries to providing loans.

If transferring Capital to a partner, subordinate, or parent organization (see p. 75), each point of Capital invested is transferred directly to the assisted organization. If transferring Capital to an unaffiliated organization, the target organization gains one Capital for each two points of Capital invested in the Transfer Capital action. *Transferred Capital may surpass an organization's maximum Capital value as defined by its Assets.*

Transfer Capital actions continue until a Halt Project action is taken to withdraw support, call in debts, or take whatever actions are necessary to reclaim the loaned Capital. If loaned Capital is invested in projects which fail or botch, this can result in Capital loss for the organization that loaned the squandered Capital.

ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIONS

These actions directly target the organization itself, either redefining it or fortifying it against outside influence.

PROTECT ORGANIZATION

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation/Intelligence + Bureaucracy/Socialize/War)

Difficulty: 1

Cumulative Difficulty: None

Interval: ([Size + Reach] – Competence) weeks

Unlike most Leadership Actions, Protect Organization has no cumulative difficulty; its Interval is only provided to account for the action's planning period. This action allows the organization to defend its Assets and projects from outside interference—for each three points of Capital invested, Attack Asset and Attack Project actions suffer a -1 external penalty to target the organization's projects and assets.

Protect Organization actions are context-sensitive. The player must declare what measures are being taken to protect the organization—such as by hiring guards to defend it from physical assault, introducing bureaucratic checks and balances to fight corruption and incompetence, or hiring secret police to screen out infiltrators and saboteurs. The Protect Organization action's external penalties only apply

to attacks which could be hindered by the described defense (a full military assault would find bureaucratic checks and balances to be little impediment to its attack on an organization's Size, for example; on the other hand, guards would protect against the attack quite nicely). Organizations may run multiple simultaneous Protect Organization actions covering different protective measures, if they can afford the Capital cost.

Protect Organization actions continue until a Halt Project action is taken to dismantle heightened security, simplify departmental regulations, or reassign former secret police.

SHIFT POLICY/STRUCTURE

Dice Pool: (Charisma/Manipulation + Socialize) for Policy; (Intelligence + Bureaucracy) for Structure

Difficulty: 3 for minor changes, 4 for moderate changes, 5 for significant changes

Cumulative Difficulty: (Size + Reach)

Interval: One week

This action reshapes a group's identity or hierarchy, sometimes radically. The leader must choose one specific goal at the start of the action from among those listed below:

New/Altered Intimacy: The organization gains an Intimacy toward a new subject with an emotional context chosen by the leader (or replaces an existing Intimacy's context with the chosen emotion). On a botch the desired Intimacy forms or changes, but the Storyteller chooses its emotional context (usually resulting in feelings directly opposed to the intent). *Note:* Intimacies always oppose having their context changed.

Remove Intimacy: The organization loses the chosen Intimacy. *Note:* Intimacies always oppose their own removal.

Change Motivation: The organization changes its Motivation to a new purpose selected by the leader. *Note:* Changing an organization's Motivation is treated as if it opposed an Intimacy (i.e. -5 internal penalty) rather than opposing the group's Motivation (which normally results in automatic failure).

Absorb Subsidiary: One of the organization's subsidiaries ceases to exist as a distinct identity. This also collapses all subsidiaries in tiers beneath that subsidiary, sparing only those organizations that have parents outside of this chain. All of the assets held by organizations collapsed this way become part of the parent organization that absorbed them, possibly recalculating the rating of the parent's Assets.

New Subsidiary: The organization spawns a new subsidiary comprising some of its existing membership. The new organization comes into existence with Policy, Structure and Assets chosen by the leader (subject to Storyteller approval). The new subsidiary does not begin with any subsidiaries of its own.

Integrate Organization: The organization merges an existing, consenting, non-affiliated organization into itself as a subsidiary.

Sever Ties: The organization disavows support of an existing subsidiary without attempting to absorb its Assets, changing it into an independent, non-affiliated organization.

Reassign Chain of Command: The organization changes which members have the authority to take Leadership Actions and what restrictions (if any) apply to their power. There is no limit on how elaborate or simple the resulting power dynamic can be; a simple dictatorship can be transformed into an elaborate legalistic bureaucracy.

ORGANIZATION TRAITS

An organization is defined as a group of individuals tied together by shared purpose, cooperative effort and common leadership.

Unlike social units, organizations do not act as characters unto themselves. Instead, organizations function as “tools” that authorized characters can use to perform Leadership Actions. Thus, instead of being an extension of a singular leader, an organization provides a common context by which those best suited may direct each action.

POLICY

The values and goals of an organization simultaneously embody the agenda of its leaders and the distinctive brand identity of its culture. Policy incorporates both Motivation and Intimacies.

MOTIVATION

An organization's Motivation is its primary goal, the underlying purpose that guides all action. **An organization's Leadership Actions cannot directly contradict its Motivation without magic specifically permitting such.**

INTIMACIES

Organizational Intimacies describe the subjects that the group has established as important priorities. The emotional context is driven by how the organization as a whole sees the Intimacy. The Haltan civilization loathes the Linowans with genocidal fury, and that preponderance of hate takes priority over the mercy and restraint that cooler-headed members might prefer to show.

Leadership Actions add +2 bonus dice or suffer a -5 internal penalty, depending on whether the actions directly support one or more of the organization's Intimacies or work against said Intimacies, respectively. If an action fits both categories, the bonus and penalty cancel out and the Leadership Action receives no modifier. When a bonus applies, the organization's members feel strongly motivated to do their best. The added dice reflect a host of Willpower expenditure, Virtue channeling and stunts that come from many members over the course of the project. The penalty reflects a group at odds with its own values, unable to perform well in the face of an unhappy and unmotivated work force.

USING POLICY

When player-controlled characters acquire enough control of an organization to define its Policy, they can make real institutional changes that continue affecting the setting without further effort. While the Solar Exalted are most adept at directing such reforms, the examples of such figures as the Empress and the mortal Bagrash Köl show that anyone can have a world-spanning impact. To the extent that the setting and default play style of **Exalted** seek to explore the consequences of having and using power, that goal best sees mechanical representation via shaping Policy.

STRUCTURE

Where Policy tracks an organization's identity, Structure examines how the organization is put together and who belongs to it. The traits encompassed by Structure are fluid by design, giving Storytellers the freedom to examine an organization in as much or little detail as their story requires.

SUBSIDIARIES, PARENTS AND PARTNERS

Very simple organizations have a singular identity and an intrinsic similarity among their membership. However, as organizations grow more complex (or they are revealed to be more complex through protagonist interaction), the group's membership divides into distinct smaller organizations, each with their own identity and traits. **An organization that is a distinct part of a larger organization is said to be a subsidiary of its parent organization.** Theoretically, an organization can include any number of subsidiary organizations, which in turn can be broken down into smaller and smaller groups until the scale becomes too small for Creation-Ruling Mandate. In practice, only those groups that must be defined are defined; individual Storytellers should utilize the level of detail that best fits their series. **No organization can be subsidiary to more than one parent.**

Parents and subsidiaries largely act independently from one another and do not actually share most of the same statistics. A Guild Caravan as a whole may have the Motivation “Maximize Profit” while the guards that make up one of its subsidiary organizations have “Defend the Caravan From Attacks and Crime.” This means that the two groups act with different priorities and different resources. Generally speaking, subsidiary organizations will not have statistics and capabilities exceeding those of their parent organizations, but exceptions exist (such as special forces commandos or other elite units). **A subsidiary's Size rating (see p. 77) may never exceed the Size rating of its parent.** The numerical rating may occasionally be equal, such as a parent that divides into a single large subsidiary supported by numerous small ones.



All of the subsidiaries branching from the same root parent are considered **partner organizations to one another**. While two partners *can* share membership—for example, a Solar’s secret police force can also be members of his newly-founded religion—putting too many eggs in one basket carries risks. A violent purge of the secret police will also damage the Solar’s cult, which would not have been the case had the two not shared members. A single person can generally only be a contributing member to a very limited number of organizations—unless the individual has no need for sleep, rest, or recreation, contributing to more than two organizations is rarely feasible.

Subsidiary, parent and partner relationships among organizations affect the resolution of some Leadership Actions. In particular, it is easier to move resources among the parts of a broader umbrella organization than among unrelated groups.

CHAIN OF COMMAND

Very few organizations in the **Exalted** setting operate as true democracies, giving each and every member the power to take Leadership Actions. Most groups divide leaders from followers, with far more of the latter than former. The simplest such dynamic forms the basis of a social unit: one leader wielding sole authority, ruling over rank-and-file subordinate to her directives. More complex hierarchies stack tiers of management, placing a leader over each subsidiary. Even more complex groups utilize a variety of diversified leaders who exercise authority within their area of expertise.

The most elaborate organizational power structures place special restrictions on the authority of individual leaders. This can take the form of bylaws or a constitution that limits all leaders and/or exercise of Leadership Actions. Alternately, the restrictions can be narrowly-tailored to specific individuals or offices, preventing junior officers and other lower-level officials from abusing or ineptly managing their office in ways that prove disastrous for the entire organization. Some restrictions may serve no apparent useful purpose, taking the form of excessive red tape or institutional corruption.

The Creation-Ruling Mandate lacks hard rules for who can lead an organization; instead, each organization’s specific internal rules and delegations of authority determine who can and cannot take Leadership Actions, and under which restrictions. See “Authority to Act” on page 70 for more details.

TEMPLATES AND NOTABLE MEMBERS

The Creation-Ruling Mandate system abstracts the actions of many individuals into blocks of like-minded identity and effort. This allows Storytellers to loosely model the ebb and flow of society without investing the considerable time and effort needed to track detailed statistics for each member. However, when protagonists play out scenes as individuals rather than operating on the scale of

MATTERS OF SCALE

Structure is a dynamic system element, intended to allow Storytellers to focus on organizations at the scale at which they are important to the story without the additional burden of tracking all parent or subsidiary organizations. The Guild is itself an organization consisting of thousands of subsidiaries (caravans, hub towns, trading fleets, expeditions), many of which have subsidiaries of their own. However, the ultimate parent organization—the Guild—is so huge that nothing smaller than the Realm can realistically target it directly. For the sake of your series, interacting with the Guild is likely a matter of dealing with individual caravans, hub towns, and factors’ investment networks. Splitting a caravan down into specific small subsidiary groups—drovers, caravan fleas, guards, and so forth—is unnecessary unless the group wishes to play out a detailed story of power struggles within the caravan. Scale the Creation-Ruling Mandate to the story you want to tell, and don’t worry about the rest.

Power Through Subsidiaries?

Astute players may notice the enormous power that can be gained when subsidiaries lend Capital to their parent organization—and, indeed, this is a major reason why the Guild is such a fearsome opponent within the Creation-Ruling Mandate. However, an organization’s Structure is ultimately a tool for focusing the scope of a story on relevant elements while excluding irrelevant clutter.

Storytellers should ignore the existence of subsidiary groups that have no direct bearing on their story, including any tiny subsidiaries players attempt to form which seem to have no purpose other than to subdivide existing assets into additional pools of Capital, as they are irrelevant to the larger operations of the parent organization. Even the Guild borrows Capital primarily from wealthy factors and hub towns—individuals possessing resources on a scale of relevance to the larger organization—rather than taking Capital from specific brothels or plantations, whose paltry contributions can do nothing to assist the mammoth operations undertaken by the Guild as a whole.

the Creation-Ruling Mandate, they directly interact with organization members as characters.

Ultimately, the only character who must be detailed in full is an organization’s leader, so that the organization can take Leadership Actions, but if Storytellers expect a greater degree of individual interaction—if the players’ characters travel with a Guild caravan for several months,

for example, playing out scenes of personal interaction with its members—it is likely that fleshing out additional characters is desirable.

ASSETS

Whereas Policy dictates what an organization believes and Structure assesses how the group is put together, Assets define what the group can actually accomplish: the people who belong to it, its property and other resources that must be utilized to conduct its operations. Assets are broken down into the categories listed below.

SIZE

Organizations are made of people. The more members a group has, the more people it can marshal to complete tasks. However, large organizations are ungainly and harder to manage, so bigger is not necessarily better. Whenever an organization takes a Leadership Action with a listed interval smaller than its Size allows, the action uses the minimum interval instead.

Rating Description

0 The organization has only a single member: its leader.

1 A small group: A circle, a Sworn Brotherhood, a squad of soldiers, a family business.

2 Dozens of individuals. A growing business. An extended family. A Dragon-Blooded household.

3 A talon of soldiers, such as a small mercenary company. A large but local business. A government ministry.

4 Hundreds of individuals: A modest army, a city-state's government, a small town, an enormous business.

5 Over a thousand souls: A small city, a legion, a large Guild caravan, a satrapial occupation force.

6 A Guild hub city. A major metropolis such as the Lap, Great Forks, or Sijan, or massive tribe such as the Arczeckhi Horde or the Icewalkers. The Cult of the Illuminated. A large Autochthonian town or very young patropolis.

7 A mighty city-state such as Nexus, Chiaroscuro or Lookshy. The Coral Archipelago and its protectorates. The Legion Sanguinary. The Realm Legions. The Thousand Scales. An Autochthonian capital.

8 The Bureau of Destiny. The Immaculate Order. The Guild in its entirety. One of the Eight Nations of Autochthonia.

9 The Realm. Autochthonia.

10

Untold billions: The teeming hordes of Hell, the population of the First Age, the raksha of the Balorian Crusade.

COMPETENCE

Where Size measures the quantity of an organization's members, Competence assesses their quality. This trait uses the same overall scale and meaning as an Ability rating, condensing all the relevant average ratings of individual Abilities members possess into a single "super-Ability." The resulting rating is tied to the organization's specific Motivation, measuring how capable the group is at completing the tasks which comprise its day-to-day operations.

For example, a militaristic state with a Motivation of "Conquer the Scavenger Lands" will base its Competence rating on the fighting prowess of its soldiers, the watchfulness of its scouts, the leadership and logistical skill of its officers and the healing puissance of its medics (among other things). Given this objective, little or none of the group's Competence has to do with how much the nation's citizens know about ancient history or delivering persuasive oratory.

Competence can also incorporate other intangible benefits—a band of elite swordsmen with Melee 4 who associate only for mutual aid and interest might hold Competence 4 (for their individually superlative swordsmanship), whereas a group of Tiger-Warriors with Melee 4 and high Drill might enjoy Competence 5, since their masterful fighting prowess is complemented by their skill at fighting as unit.

Additionally, for complex ventures such as a Guild caravan, differing levels of competence among elements of the caravan may shift the balance of the organization's total Competence. For example, a Guild caravan full of superlative bureaucrats and merchants might normally rate Competence 4, but end up with Competence 3 because it hired shoddy guards to protect it as a cost-saving measure.

Supernatural might is another such intangible. While mortal organizations cannot normally have Competence higher than 5, organizations with significant supernatural membership, such as raksha principalities, may enjoy Competence ratings of 6 or even higher.

If an organization's Motivation changes, its Competence must be reassessed. A prosperous city-state that abandons plans of economic dominance in favor of raising an army forfeits its Competence 4 merchants for Competence 1 soldiers.

INFLUENCE

Organizations don't exist in isolation. Most have neighbors, either in a literal geographic sense or metaphorically through commerce and other forms of interaction. An organization's Influence measures how much control the group can exert on associates, competitors and the broader society in which the organization is situated. Influence can take many forms, from access to friendly politicians,





to celebrity status as a prestigious group, to the protection money paid to local organized crime. In all cases, having higher Influence is a matter of becoming more invested as an actual authority or power broker.

Rating Description

0 Nonexistent: Nobody has heard of the organization, and it has no means by which to exert its political will.

1 Inconsequential: Within the organization's Reach, the group can only affect unimportant decisions, such as influencing purchasing habits of luxury goods or building on already-extant rumors.

2 Narrow Influence: The group can exert nominal influence over many low importance decisions throughout its Reach. The organization is powerful within its narrow interest, such as a company that sells a popular brand of merchandise, a highly-reputed mercenary company, an up-and-coming religion, etc. The group has no capacity to affect the lives of non-members in ways not directly related to its function.

3 Moderate Influence: Overall, groups with Influence 3 resemble their Influence 2 counterparts, save that their interest—and thus their influence—is commensurately broader. Businesses are not simply competitive, but industry leaders or diverse corporations with a wide array of unrelated products and services.

4 Major Influence: The organization is not a ruling authority per se, but is well-regarded by larger organizations with such broad authority. The group can make suggestions to its patron(s) and expect those suggestions to carry weight, but such power is advisory only and has no guarantee of favorable outcome. Generally speaking, patrons will more likely implement requests related to the group's purpose. For example, an arms dealer might advise a client state on whether to go to war, but few governments care what resident arms dealers think about proposed civics works projects.

5 Informal Authority: The group has a powerful reputation as described for Influence 4. However, the organization's favor as a privileged group extends well beyond its immediate interests. Suggested actions completely unrelated to the group's purpose often receive implementation simply on the basis of good prior relations.

6 Limited Authority: The organization wields significant, but narrow power over those in its Reach. An occupying horde may have successfully crushed all rival armies in a particular region, but not yet consolidated power over the area's economic or political activity. The individual bureaus that make up most civilized governments also have Influence 6, as they possess ruling authority specific to their executive function. In especially progressive lands, a democratic process of some kind divides authority among coalitions of voting blocs.

7 Authority: The organization is in charge, dominating the lives of those in its Reach. Such groups permit limited dissent and even some free expression, provided that dissenters do not actually break the peace or interrupt the organization's normal operations. Influence 7 organizations typically make examples out of dangerous or popular troublemakers, but do not generally waste resources cracking down on minor infractions. Many governments in Creation have Influence 7, empowering them to pass laws on most aspects of life and expect the vast majority of citizens to obey. Criminals and dissidents still exist within authoritarian societies, but the overall level of obedience far exceeds resistance.

8 Oppressive: The group is undisputedly in control of the territory encompassed by its Reach. Groups with this Influence largely act as those with Influence 7, but these organizations further employ any and all means necessary to stifle perceived resistance, however small. Obedient residents enjoy the privilege of limited self-determination, free to act as desired so long as their actions do not violate the law. Where some measure of justice infuses the group's reign, the severity of each offense dictates the severity of resulting sanctions. In more traditional dictatorships, laws often have arbitrary rationale and consequences.

9 Totalitarian: The group dictates all arenas of life within its Reach, often in the form of rigid laws and/or taboos backed up with a persistent threat of violence against noncompliance. While most Influence 9 organizations are actual governments, they can also be criminal cartels, fanatical cults, ruthless monopolies and the like. Resistance continuously simmers against all totalitarian regimes, though rarely in any form dangerous enough to threaten the group.



- 10 Absolute Dominion: The organization governs all aspects of life within its Reach, however banal. Those crushed beneath such ultimate tyranny do not live: they merely exist as puppets and caricatures following set scripts. Only the most powerful social magic can establish such all-encompassing and unnatural dominance.

WEALTH

Having enough cash on hand to deal with basic expenses and pay appropriate bribes is a necessary and daily routine for some organizations. Not all Wealth is so liquid, however. This asset also encompasses all forms of property, including vehicles, land, buildings and other infrastructural resources.

Rating	Description
0	The organization is utterly destitute.
1	A small start-up or family business, roughly equivalent to Resources 3.
2	A successful business, roughly equivalent to Resources 4.
3	The wealth of a bandit king, young merchant prince, or retired scavenger lord, roughly equivalent to Resources 5.
4	The wealth of a Guild caravan, small city, Raksha freehold or the operating budget of a Realm legion.
5	The wealth of a Guild factor's investment network. Chejop Kejak's personal salary.
6	The wealth of city-states such as the Lap, Paragon, and An-Teng. The collective resources of a Guild Council.
7	The wealth of mighty trade-nations such as Chiaroscuro, Nexus, and Great Forks. The Seventh Legion's operating budget. The investments and treasury of a hierarch or Deathlord.
8	The personal finances of mighty First Age Exalts; the wealth of the Great Houses or the Mountain Folk.
9	The coffers of the Realm at its height; the wealth of the Guild.
10	The unimaginable wealth of the Old Realm.

REACH

Where Influence assesses how much power an organization wields over its neighbors and environment, Reach determines the geographical breadth of that power. Organizations with low Reach only operate on a local level, with increasingly higher values escalating to regional, directional and ultimately global power. Organizations can only proj-

ect force and take actions within the territory spanned by their Reach. This also means that very large organizations cannot be meaningfully challenged by smaller-scale competitors, since the latter can only contest actions in their singular locales. One practical result is that the Guild, as a total organization, may only be directly targeted by other global-scaled organizations such as the Realm; all lesser powers must attack the Guild (or the Realm) a piece at a time, going after smaller subsidiaries within the scope of their lesser Reach (such as specific hub towns or caravans, or Dragon-Blooded households).

Rating Description

0	The organization cannot affect anything outside of a single building or forest clearing.
1	Village to small town, rural expanse (e.g. forest, lake, desolate wasteland), plantation, large estate
2	Town to small city, large rural expanse
3	City, primeval wilderness expanse (untouched by civilization), circuit of related townships, one major road through a region
4	City-state, large metropolis, the nations within a particular trade route, the settlements along a major river such as the Yanaze, island chain such as the Neck
5	Region such as the entire Hundred Kingdoms, major trade route touching on large population centers and possibly crossing Directions
6	Comprehensive reach spanning the equivalent of one entire Direction
7	Comprehensive reach spanning the equivalent of two Directions
8	Comprehensive reach spanning the equivalent of three Directions
9	Comprehensive reach spanning the equivalent of four Directions
10	Ready access to all of Creation

SPECIAL ASSETS

Some resources don't neatly fit into the basic categories above. For example, artifacts and manses are essentially priceless in the Time of Tumult. Even the least of these wonders confer advantages that most mortals cannot access easily or at all. The greatest relics like the Realm Defense Grid or the Eye of Autochthon can change the universe, making them ultimate trump cards in any bid for power. While these resources do not increase an organization's available Capital (see p. 81), Special Assets enable organizations to do things they otherwise couldn't. Each Special Asset is actually a separate Asset with its own rating. Different Special Assets do not stack with one another in any way.



INTERDIMENSIONAL FRANCHISING

While most mortal organizations operate exclusively in Creation, many supernatural groups extend their reach across two or more realms of existence. For example, the Mask of Winters has a strong presence in the Underworld and a modest foothold in Creation. All such organizations must denote a home realm, typically wherever their power is strongest. However, the group's subsidiaries can be based in a different realm entirely. Thus, the Mask of Winters's deathly empire is an Underworld-based organization, of which his occupation force in Thorns is a second, subsidiary organization.

The only real downside to such arrangements is that organizations cannot redistribute resources to such remote satellite groups without reliable communication and/or transportation magic. A two-way portal, shadowland or other standing gateway between two realms of existence qualifies as Special Asset 3 (see below). Add +1 to this rating if the gate's location is largely secret or +2 if the gateway is well-hidden and its location isn't known to anyone outside of the organization. Also add +1 if the gate connects more than two realms of existence.

The Influence and Reach ratings listed in this Appendix all assume Creation as the base of operations. Storytellers can proportionally extrapolate values for other realms of existence by comparing to Creation (e.g. 10 indicates total access to the realm in question).

In addition to making certain Leadership Actions possible as appropriate to their specific nature, Special Assets add bonus successes equal to their rating whenever their use provides a demonstrable advantage to a Leadership Action. **This bonus does not stack; only the greatest applicable wonder applies.** The Storyteller is final arbiter of when this bonus applies, but can generally afford to be lenient. An organization that frequently relies upon its unique advantages can be dealt a crippling blow by attacking that Asset, and increasingly runs the risk that enemies will realize the importance of doing so.

A Special Asset's rating is directly proportional to its usefulness:

One dot indicates the Asset is broken or otherwise won't work for the organization in its present state. Alternately, it might be perfectly operational, but require something the group lacks (like basic artifacts requiring committed notes in the hands of mortals, or a war machine that needs a specific command code or crystal key). Because there is not a numerical difference between a daiklave that can't

be attuned and a secret entrance to the Realm Defense Grid, assume that the difficulty of making a Special Asset 1 useful correlates directly to the actual value of that asset. This means Special Assets rated at 1 are not so much tools as placeholders "reserving" the organization's chance to acquire them in working order later. Additionally, powerful wonders attract powerful enemies looking to claim them. An organization that stumbles upon a truly epic find must take care to keep their discovery secret, at least until they decide whether to make it useful or find a way to safely trade it to someone who can (or thinks she can).

Special Assets rated 2-6 correlate to wonders rated 1-5 dots, respectively, using the Artifact/Manse rating scale. This means a Special Asset 4 confers powers or other advantages like those of an Artifact/Manse 3. Higher ratings are explained below.

Finally, Exalted subordinates within an organization in non-leadership positions (i.e. who do not take Leadership Actions on behalf of the organization), such as assassins, hired champions or sorcerers, may be treated as special assets. A young to middle-aged Terrestrial Exalt is generally treated as Special Asset 4, a Celestial Exalt as Special Asset 5, and a Solar, Abyssal or Infernal Exalt as Special Asset 6.

Rating Description

7	Asset has powers like those of a personal-scale Artifact N/A (e.g. the greatest suits of Celestial Battle Armor)
8	Asset has powers of an industrial-scale Artifact N/A (e.g. Kireeki-Class Skyship)
9	Asset is a true wonder of the world (e.g. Nexus Dams, the Five-Metal Shrike, the Aidenweiss)
10	Asset confers an overwhelming advantage unmatched by most adversaries (e.g. Eye of Autochthon, Realm Defense Grid, Salinian Working-scale Miracle Shell)

USING ASSETS

Unlike most Exalted game traits, Assets are always context-sensitive. While Strength 5 is simply Strength 5, the specific constitution of Assets always matters. Whether an organization has Size 3 or 4 is less important than whether it derives that Size from masses of priests or soldiers. An organization's Assets determine how easy or difficult the actions it undertakes will be, and may outright disqualify it from some actions altogether. A dream god's cult may attack the local Immaculate temple through disapproving sermons, but probably cannot drown the temple by diverting the course of a river—it lacks the manpower and expertise. A merchant whose Wealth is tied up in a vast stockpile of anagathic drugs could offer lavish bribes to most mortal organizations, but has little to offer the already-immortal Court of Seasons.

ACCOUNTING OF ASSETS

By default, Assets only follow the big picture of an organization's resources, distilling the entirety of the group's capabilities into five numbers. This allows Storytellers to quickly add organizations to their games as needed without rigorously detailing every single custom or wagon the group in question owns. Organizations that play a prominent role in a series probably merit a higher level of detail.

The questions listed below should help Storytellers quickly discern relevant and useful details:

Size: What is the group's exact headcount? How is the overall Size expressed and arranged via Structure traits?

Competence: What actual Ability ratings and/or other capabilities do templates or specific members have? Are members competent at other endeavors outside of the group's Motivation?

Influence: Where does the organization have power? Is it more influential in some geographical areas than others? Is the group influential because it is feared or respected or consistently underestimated? Just how far does the organization's Influence go? Does it have any specific politicians or business leaders on its payroll (including illegal bribes)? Is the group well-connected to the criminal underworld or an upstanding pillar of the community? How do other organizations regard the group in question?

Wealth: How much of the organization's monetary resources are liquid assets like currency or valuable commodities? What property does the group own and where (buildings, land, vehicles, pack animals, slaves, etc.)? What are the organization's streams of income and how reliable are those streams? What are the group's recurring expenses like payroll, taxes and bribes to local protection rackets? How widely known is the organization's Wealth? What are the group's "priceless" possessions (i.e. those deemed too valuable to sell and/or truly irreplaceable, but not qualifying as Special Assets)?

Reach: Where exactly does the organization have power? How quickly can different parts of the organization communicate? How readily can that communication be disrupted? Does it have any blind spots within the span of its Reach (such as the warded and haunted districts of Chiaroscuro that none of the city's organizations willingly enter)?

tion's capacity to act at any given moment is abstracted into points of Capital, a "fuel trait" that powers Leadership Actions in much the same way that motes power Charms. **Organizations generate points of Capital equal to the sum of their Assets (Size + Competence + Influence + Wealth + Reach). This is also the maximum amount of Capital an organization may normally have.**

UNCOMMITTED CAPITAL

When an organization comes into existence, all its Capital points start out uncommitted and free for use. Uncommitted Capital represents capacity held in reserve, a kind of "potential energy" waiting for directions that advance the organization's Motivation. An organization that has spent none of its Capital is assumed to be "treading water," covering the overhead necessary to continue operating but doing little more.

It is generally wise to keep some of an organization's Capital uncommitted to handle unexpected emergencies or sudden opportunities. However, doing so also forfeits some of an organization's potential productivity as an insurance policy, so finding the right balance of action and inaction is a critical component of good management.

Few Storyteller organizations should be encountered with all of their Capital uncommitted—in all likelihood, when the protagonists encounter an organization it is already busy running projects of its own, attacking rivals, and protecting its Assets.

COMMITTED CAPITAL

Taking Leadership Actions using an organization requires an investment of Capital. **Mechanically, this translates to a Capital cost assigned to each such action, equal to the action's base difficulty.** Paying these costs does not reduce the organization's total Capital points; instead, the expenditure ties up those resources so that they can't be allocated elsewhere. **The commitment of Capital remains for the full duration of each action, meaning that the organization's resources stay locked up in the task, even if the project becomes untenable. A Halt Project action is needed to abort and reallocate the resources assigned to a project the organization wishes to abandon before it ends in success or failure.**

Because disasters and attacks can increase an action's Capital cost during the course of the project, players may choose to commit more Capital points to a task than they think they will need, just in case. **Fortunately, any Capital invested beyond the total required for the task contributes equivalent bonus dice to the Leadership action.** For example, if Admiral Sand invests 7 Capital in a mercantile venture requiring 5 Capital to successfully complete, his Bureaucracy rolls will enjoy two bonus dice at the end of each interval. If a series of dust storms interrupt his project, raising the Capital cost from 5 to 6, then he still has enough Capital to complete the project, but only enjoys one bonus die after the storms.

CAPITAL

Assets measure what resources an organization has overall, but the ratings don't capture the liquidity of these resources or the limitations of their usage. An organiza-



GAINING AND LOSING CAPITAL

Organizations increase or reduce their total Capital points through changes to their Asset ratings. Increasing an Asset by one dot adds one point of uncommitted Capital. Losing an Asset dot forces the organization's leader to reflexively lose one point of Capital. If the organization has no uncommitted Capital to discard and must instead lose a point of committed Capital, the Leadership Action that Capital is invested in automatically fails.

Failed and botched Leadership Actions can also cause the loss of points of Capital, without concurrent loss of Assets (see p. 69). The Replenish Capital action can be used to make up such lost Capital, up to the maximum value dictated by the organization's Assets.

ASSETS AND BACKGROUNDS

There exists no fixed and solid relationship between Assets and Backgrounds. While commanding an organization with high Assets can act as an easy justification for obtaining the Resources or Influence backgrounds, it does not universally follow that the heads of all wealthy organizations are themselves wealthy, or that the heads of politically influential organizations may easily bend that influence to support their personal goals. Immaculate temples, for example, often command significant Wealth in the form of donations and government tithes, even as the monks themselves live in a state of humble poverty.

Similarly, a character's personal Backgrounds may be invested to help provide an organization with start-up Assets, but doing so generally cedes those resources to the organization's operating budget, removing them from the character's personal control. If not, then the organization risks sudden instability as it is tied to the fortunes (and misfortunes) of a single leader's contacts or wealth.

Merchant princes and trader kings, masters of jade and emperor thieves; salesmen born with the trick of selling fire to the gods; genius tacticians and profiteers, hailed by the Fair Folk for their treachery; the Guild is the greatest roll of mortal merchants the world has ever known. For seven centuries the Guild has dealt in coins, chains, spells, and souls, confounding even the might of the Realm—what will it buy and sell to secure its survival in the Time of Tumult? Will the Exalted become its partners, its masters, or its pawns?

This book includes:

- An examination of the Guild by Direction, from the mammoth caravans of the North to the great merchant fleets of the West.
- Details of the Guild's commerce with the supernatural, from the hungry Fair Folk to the restless ghosts of the Timeless Order of Manacle and Coin.
- The Creation-Ruling Mandate, a new system for telling large-scale stories of economics, empire, and warfare.

